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DRAMAS FOR THE THEATRE OF TO-MORROW
NUMBER ONE: GUILTY SOULS



DRAMAS FOR THE THEATRE OF TO-MORROW

A great public should be revered, not used as children are when pedlars wish to hook money from them . . . The public you may flatter, as you do a well-loved child, to better, to enlighten it; not as you do a pampered child of quality, to perpetuate the error you profit from.

GOETHE: Wilhelm Meister

Drama deals with the passions. In England dramatists and actors seem to be out to please a public—a certain public, not the People—which has a certain terror lest a scrap of real passion peep out at it. Dramatist and actor succeed in pleasing and becoming mild in doing so . . . tame mildness is not serenity.

GORDON CRAIG: The Theatre Advancing

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

INVOCATION (Elkin Mathews)

ARDOURS AND ENDURANCES (Stokes)

AURELIA (Dutton)

PROSE

*FANTASTICA, being the Smile of the Sphinx and other Tales
of Imagination* (shortly)

DRAMAS FOR THE THEATRE OF TO-MORROW

GUILTY SOULS

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ROBERT NICHOLS

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Hearn, Imperial University, Tokio



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ROBERT NICHOLS

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*This the American edition of
my first play to two who, with-
out knowing it, did so much
to influence my spirit in the
direction here taken: FLOR-
ENCE LAMONT and GABRIELLE
CHANLER.*

PR
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1922



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NOTE

The persons and events portrayed in this play are imaginary. No reference is made to any living person.

ROBERT NICHOLS

INVOCATION

for

ALL COMRADES OF ALL NATIONS WHERESOEVER
THOSE COMRADES BE

Whose are the heights of love, of power of
thought?—

Not his whose eyes turned inward sadly scan
The conflict which desire of these has brought
Between what he would do and deems he can.

Let to yourself yourself remain obscure,
What is without survey. Then from the steep
Toward the height, with eye keen, with foot sure
Over sheer Nothing's brink essay to leap.

What though your body to the cornice clings,
Though scarce th' uncertain foot obeys your
will?—

Full oftentimes the gods have granted wings
To such as proved his courage, not his skill!

And do you fall, clasped in your very hand
Flames up the soul you knew not yours till now,
And by its brightness those who, doubtful, stand
May see to dare that dire leap to the brow!

PREFACE

to be read AFTER the play

Il n'appartient qu'au courage de regler la vie.

VAUVERNAQUES

We live in this world only that we may go onward without ceasing.

MOZART

Thou wert born not when thou choosest, but when the world had need of thee.

EPICETUS

Why Write a Play?

I WROTE this play because I considered I had something to say which could best be said in the form of a play and because I earnestly desire to do what I can to aid the renaissance of the British theatre. Shortage of good plays is one of the reasons why that renaissance is slow. The only way to learn to write a good play is to start writing a play as well as one knows how.

The Genro and the Pups

In this far land of Japan, in which I am at present residing, there are three or four Very Old Men of terrific reputation. These are the original makers of the New Japan or those whom the original makers have co-opted. Their record is amazing. Undoubtedly they have performed almost miracles. They have become legendary within their own lifetimes. The title they bear is that of the Genro or Elder Statesmen: a highly honourable title.

But old men are old men the world over, and

in like manner also young men are young men. There are not wanting those who hint that the day of the Very Old Men is over: in short, that the Very Old Men are now a mere useless brake on the wheel of things, setting up a squeal and friction, and necessitating, by the assiduity with which they cling to the wheel, a phenomenal waste of energy. So it has come that among certain sections of the community—among the more daring and hilarious of the young—that the title *Genro* remains no longer the exclusive designation of certain eminent statesmen, but is applied, good-humouredly enough, to a very large class of persons the counterpart of which is not unrecognizable in the West. At the same time, it must be remembered that the title *Genro* is one of honour in Japan. Would that it were so in the West! In all the West what makers of nations have we seen in the last twenty years save President Wilson, Professor Masaryk, and Mr. Venizelos? Internationalist or nationalist, these three informed whole communities with their spirit. Not one of them is an Englishman. One only man can we claim, whose voice, a voice almost religious, is as the voice of one in the wilderness: Jan Smuts, a Dutchman. No, in England there are no true *Genro*: there is only a phalanx of creatures to whom the term *Genro* can be applied without the good humour of the young Japanese and with all their impatience and bitterness. Otherwhere, scattered up and down England, belonging to something vaguely known in the reviews, for want

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of a better title, as the *Intelligencia*, are a number of younger individuals of both sexes, this number being designated by the aforesaid English Genro as the Selfish Young or the Unlicked Pups. These Selfish Young, these Unlicked Pups, present a very curious exterior. Taller, generally, than the Genro, and more physically fit (save when they have had the misfortune to stop a bullet defending, as the Genro newspapers assert, the Genro's home), they bear on their faces a certain highly unbecoming expression. The substance of this expression is variously reported in the Genro newspapers, together with only too well-founded complaints as to the utter abandonment of deportment displayed by these Pups, in that they continue impenitently unaware of the National Importance of Wearing Stiff Collars and of Preferring Cricket to Tennis. Certain characteristics of this expression have, however, been more or less agreed upon. Among others are the following: "sullen," "reckless and brazen," "hard," "petulant," "openly disrespectful" (so much less edifying than covertly disrespectful), "discontented," "heartless," "anarchistic," "irreligious," "conceited," "overweening," "argumentative," etc., etc. See *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Spectator*; *The Day Before Yesterday: Reminiscences of a Fairer Age*, by Timothy Genro; *The Young Woman of To-day: an Exposure without Prejudice*, by Tabitha and Matilda Genro; *What is a Gentleman?* an article by Tobias Genro, J.P., ex-M.P.; *The Cult of the Morbid*, by Sir Robert-

son Genro; *The Salacity of the Modern Novel*, by Clement Genro; *The Cult of Sans-culottism*, by Edward Genro, R.A.; *Music and Moral Decadence*, by Marsyas McGenro (President of the Orpheus Academy of Music); *The Curse of Feminism*, by Jacintha Genro-Smith (late Headmistress of St. Sophie's); *The Curse of Socialism*, by Professor Mouldiwarp Genro-Robinson; *The Curse of Freethought*, by Principal Genro-Jones; *Where are we Going? or, the Curse of Optimism*, by "Genro," of the *Daily Prestidigitator*; *The Fallacy of Truth*, by St. Thomas Genro (late Editor of *Quintessence*, a quarterly); *The Fallacy of Freedom*, by Richard Genro (Editor of *Byepaths*, the progressive monthly); *The Fallacy of Faith*, *The Fallacy of Hope*, *The Fallacy of Charity*—*Three Booklets Contributory to a Brighter Tomorrow*, by Henry Genro (Member of Parliament for Little Wiggleston, Member of the United Churches Council, Associate of the Academy of Sciences and the Society of Letters, author of *The Decay of Knowledge*, *The Death-Bed of Democracy*, *The Doom of Science*, and of the famous *Short Cuts to Safety*; also, in collaboration with Mrs. Genro-Smythe, the popular novelist, of *Crumbs of Comfort: an Old-fashioned Novel*; and with Lady Blanche Bittersweet-Genro, of Genro Park, of *The Infallibles*, a Modern Satirical Comedy in Five Acts with Epilogue). There is no need to quote further authorities. Now, as ever, we may leave these to speak for themselves. Henceforward the reader will experience no diffi-

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culty in gathering to whom I refer when I speak of the Pups, since the Pups have been so definitely described by the Genro that the rawest policeman could detect them, the only remaining wonder being that the said policeman has not shut them up. But perhaps the decadence so universally prevalent, if we are to trust the Genro, has reached High Places, or there does exist some sort of Hidden Hand or Reactionary Party, such as the Pups are sometimes heard to hint at, which still continues to believe in the myths of Habeas Corpus and Freedom of Opinion so justly exploded during the Post-War Period.

This much then by way of definition. Let us return to the play.

More Reasons for Writing a Play

But the desire to create a work of art in the form of a drama was not the only reason which led me to write *Guilty Souls*. Other themes, suitable to the form of a drama, were not lacking. Why, then, did I do it? and for whom did I do it?

I did it to satisfy certain needs of my own, later to be explained, which are not without their bearing on the question of for whom it was written, since, an impenitent Pup myself, I was selfish enough to write it not for you, Genro, if by any mischief of the Eternal Humorist you have had the ill fortune to chance upon this pet particular volume of mine, but for the other Selfish Young, those many Unlicked Pups who have acquired that taste for using their heads instead of their

hands and preferring paper and ink to leather and willow which you deplore so much. Yet what matter? I am not writing this for you. Settle into your chair. Ring the bell. "Another muffin, please, and, Waiter, a sheet of notepaper: I must write to *The Times*. . . . Now, what shall I say of this disgusting young man who asserts that he is going to disregard me and address himself to other young men—and young women, too (mark you!)? We have educated them, and—what is the world coming to?—they have taken advantage of it. And yet, maybe, it will be best to practise self-restraint, to show him a good example, perhaps write to him privately. A word in season from One-who-has-been-Young, One-who-Knows. . . . Thank you, Waiter, you may take the writing paper away. . . . Best of all, surely, not to write this time: stay the hand until he commits himself again, and then ask Albert Genro and Mrs. Winter-Genro and General Genro and Admiral Genro and Sir Autumn Genro to join with me, thus forming a circle truly representative of what is best in the nation, in order to conduct a little Mission of Enlightenment among the Young, using this young man and his misguided associates as text."

Counter-attack Provocative

But perhaps, O Genro, I will, after all, write for you. You are not likely to read it. And if you do, you may enjoy the humour. Humour is one of your strong points. You believe in a
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PREFACE

Sense of Humour. So do we. But not all the time. Not when we are discussing our private affairs, any more than when you are discussing them for us. If hereafter you should notice an occasional unexpected exercise of the sense, I beg you to be assured that its use is the sincerest form of flattery. "Well-formed, healthy children," remarks Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister's Travels*, "bring much into the World along with them: Nature has given to each whatever he requires for time and duration; to unfold this is our duty. . . . One thing, however, there is which no child brings into the World with him, and yet it is on this one thing that all depends for making man in every point a man: that thing is Reverence!" You, who, it is understood, consider yourself in all points men, have revered nothing of ours, of those according to you so much nearer the child. To-day you are being paid in your own coin.

The Attack Called off

And yet even at this hour did you show any sign not merely of comprehension, but even of endeavouring to comprehend, how gladly would we join with you in trying in these difficult years to save the soul of England, and, aye, of Europe now so mortally sick! But perhaps it is already too late. Sometimes we feel in us your opportunism, your corruption, above all your cynicism—and of many wrongs that is the worst and the least endurable. When so we feel the knife is raised to cut us away from you for ever.

Macaulay's New Zealander on the Ruins

Do not think this attitude of ours is a product solely of the War and will pass with other attitudes so engendered, though the War and its betrayals has inflamed our emotion to such a passion that it is not untrue to say that up and down England there exists a considerable body of young men and women, otherwise counted sane and even useful members of Society, who hate you, cordially hate you. That is the plain truth. It is very probably unreasonable that they should so hate you. But it is understandable, and, if it is not understandable, it is nevertheless a fact. It is not a fact that pleases this particular Pup. I feel no glee at it. So unusual a social pain is witness to an uncommon wound. I do not rejoice in the division. I have had and still have friends among the less Genroesque of the Genro. I am sorry if I hurt them. But a fact is a fact, and this is one that requires, more than most of the facts disliked by the Genro, to be faced. In the process of finding my way East I have spoken to no small number of Pups, Pups who had worked or fought in the War and, with one exception out of sixteen young men and women, all asserted that they had left England or returned to their old jobs, which they disliked, because they feared infection. "There has been something wrong with the country for a long time," they complained; "we see it is no place for the young." Said one, "I would rather die on a rubber plantation, which is what I am

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due to do, than have the choice of living like a parasite or drinking myself to death at home. I am a Colonial. They entertained us, they made a fuss of us—as was not unnatural since we were of an allied nation, that is, a Dominion. But they thought we were schoolboys. They treated us like schoolboys. They lectured and petted us like schoolboys, and we just saw the same treatment being meted out to the young men and women of the country—only there was more lecture and less petting. And the lectures! My God!—Sexual morality from those who were against any but the sexual instruction of a maiden aunt! Political morality from a House of Commons that is a closed house to any member with twopennyworth of independent spirit or sincerity! Social morality from the profiteers! International morality from the supporters of Versailles! And when it wasn't morality it was the want of religion or faith or charity in the young! During the time I was in England I never met a man over forty who was in any sense a citizen of to-day. They can't see that colossal changes have come over the earth and that our religion, our faith, and our charity are things that have nothing to do with their forms of those things. Why, the landscape in England is simply littered with skeletons of extinct institutions! To live in England is like trying to live in a house which has a corpse sitting in state in each room—and every manjack of a corpse attended by several hundred elderly courtiers who introduce you to it

and bid you shake it by the hand and obey something it was said to have said to their fathers sixty years ago in a different house. No, sir, we may be crude, we *are* crude; we may be raw, we *are* raw; but we are men enough to know that there is neither truth, morality, nor justice, in any modern sense of those words, in England to-day, and so we are in a hurry to get back to our countries or off to any job we can. And I advise you—yes, you, sir—to do the same. Go to a Dominion. If you can't help build England from within you may be able to help build from without. And it might be good for the Dominions, too. They are not bold enough: they want some husky writers who are not afraid to put it over—to tell England that her capital is no longer Westminster, but wherever over the wide world there are gathered together half a dozen men and women of our nations believing in that England which your elder folks have never seen or guessed at and for which our pals died or are working! Being, as a Colonial, better educated in essentials than the home product, he could express himself with precision. But the substance of his remarks was common to all. So much for the Colonial.

Outside England, Beyond Europe

Sitting in this little room in the capital city of strangers of another race and colour, at the farther end of the world, I become sensible of immense distance, as if I were upon another planet. Outside the crickets screech and the night-watchman

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passes clacking his rattle, or the blind masseur, threading the mazes of the immense warren, cries his melancholy cry. The inalterable strangeness of those sounds and the overpowering sadness I feel when I hear them are the witnesses of my harrowing isolation. Here all has passed away save hope: "the second soul of the unhappy," Goethe terms it. The still light of the reading lamp falls on the backs of the books in the shelves and the few open books upon the work-table. Behold the immortals: those over whom time and place have no dominion, who, speaking to me, would comfort me were I in heaven or hell. Heroic forms filled with ardour and compassion!—your dearness to me is the measure of my sorrow: for your tongues are not tongues to which those who are said to lead my country would listen. Those who lead my country do not seem to see that she, who in the past has captained Europe, to-day stands, certainly no less than Europe stands, in need of that which saves. During the last hundred and fifty years a greater change has come over the position of man than since the death of Christ. The hour is without precedent and demands unprecedented effort. Prometheus is on the brink of victory or of defeat, and, if he is defeated, not Zeus will have slain him, but he himself with his own hands.

Yet no one seems to see it save the Scientists, a few of the Selfish Young and the much derided, the much long-suffering leaders of the Selfish Young—those who did so much to bring us light

and now continue the struggle amid the deepening darkness. Some few of the Genro, those who, occupying the highest positions on the Towers of Government, have become thereby more sensible to the vibration of the earthquake, sound from time to time a blast or two of warning. "We are all threatened;" they cry, "there are forces at work of a depth unknown. Make haste, or it will be too late to save your goods! "

But I, sitting with the ageless immortals open before me, read from their pages a different evangel: "Save your souls! Doubt and perish, or believe and be saved! Genros, cease to be Genros; and young men, cease to be cynical Hamlets or Don Juans who have ceased even to believe in Don Juanism. Arise—the hour of Faust and of Prometheus is at hand! "

Classical Protest, together with Scandalous Conduct of the Youngest Clubman

The member wakes in his chair. *The Times* has fallen over his face, blotting out the sky. Surely he has been dreaming. Horrible! It must have been the muffin. . . .

But it was not the muffin.

He observes the gaze of the Youngest Member—how did that mere pup get elected?—fixed upon him as if waiting for him to die. "Ah, so he wants the *Times*, does he? Well, I haven't read it, but I suppose he must have it. No manners, these Pups. Fancy looking at me like that! And his smile. I don't like, I don't trust it. Queer, not

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like an ordinary smile. H'm, I see he has some apparatus strapped over his breast—he has been wounded nigh the heart. Certainly he has been wounded by the mouth—as if he has received a buffet on it. That accounts for the smile. He is looking at me again over the paper. Now he will speak—confound it, people shouldn't speak in clubs. Ah, but he can't . . . I see it now: he's dumb. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! And yet, perhaps—temporarily speaking, of course—just as well. He may be a friend of the Johnny who wrote that book. One never knows, one can't trust the Young—never could. But one did hope the War had turned them into men. And yet they are as bad as ever. Always the same: once it was Socialism, Feminism, Atheism—now it is God-alone-knows-what."

But the Youngest Member does not cease to stare. The great room is darkening. Outside the buses rumble by, shaking the Club as if with the preliminary roll of a vast earthquake. The body of the Youngest Member becomes immensely long, and the legs and feet stick gauntly out from beneath the sheets of *The Times* like the legs and feet of a corpse whose shroud is too short. The lessening twilight in the window behind the Youngest Member gives to the silhouette of his bristling head and emaciated shoulders the appearance of a Don Quixote at once absurdly young and immensely old. He has become very still and his cheeks very colourless, but his eyes in their shadowy sockets are motionlessly bent upon the

member seated by the half-empty plate of muffins. A cold blue light, that looks first like a star and then like a tear, but which at last resolves itself into nothing but a cold blue, impartial and scientific glare kindles in those strange orbs. The member with the muffins finds his gaze held by that gaze. He cannot turn his glance away, and he begins (against his will) to read the thoughts passing in the brain of the dumb, thoughts straying out of those fixed eyes in which an unknown light seems curdled and frozen.

"Time will give us our way, until we in turn are superseded . . . though I would have you note here that what has struck most of us about you, Genro, is neither your hypocrisy, your obstinacy, nor your prejudice (all of which are to be found in both Genro and Pups, each after his kind), but your quite unlooked-for stupidity. Yes, your stupidity is crushing. You have not even the sense to follow your own instincts of compromise. Some of you whine at us, some of you threaten, a few of you, who think yourselves in the vanguard while you are really in the guard's van, slobber over the sentimental images you have made of us. No one among you, save a few scientifically-minded persons, will try to see that, though we are neither chaste nor unselfish, humble or tolerant (at any rate in your sense of the words), there is one virtue, one only, which cannot possibly be denied us, and which in the face of, I daresay, the slightly melancholy if good-humoured derision of youth itself I will proclaim: that virtue being

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Sincerity. You, Genro, complain that we are not as you are. I can well believe it. And we thank heaven for it: because our gods are not your gods, and therefore your ways, by the inalterable logic of sincerity, cannot be our ways. We have seen you endeavouring to eat your cake and have it too—over religion, over social relations, over sex: the three sovereign problems of modern life. Christianity is not dead, but the Christianity known to your Established Church is, and, to our nostrils, its body stinks. Feudalism is dead because personal responsibility is no longer connected with property. The late-Victorian attitude over sex is no longer workable, since it depended ultimately on that Christian tradition which is dead though Christ lives. On all these three problems that which was is moribund, and you, Genro, pretend that you are not aware of the fact. We have only one belief, and that is: if a man has a faith he should live up to it. We do not see you, Genro, living up to your faiths. ‘The letter Killeth.’ In the Established Church at present Christ both is and is not divine, the soul is immortal but resurrection doubtful, hell both is and is not, marriage is indissoluble and dissoluble. We care not a jot which is chosen so be that, when it is chosen, it is lived by and lived for. Choose the hard way, stick to the highest severities of dogma, and you will have but few followers of that fierce Christ, it is true, but they will be real followers, mystics of grace in the Pascalian sense. Abolish the divinity of Christ, etc., make Christ

a man nobler than Socrates, become secular, trusting to the beauty of Christ's character and of His saints, and you will have many followers, for you will gain in breadth what you lose in intensity. Science has not killed religion—it has merely demanded greater fruits of it. Conflict is not the only product and factor of evolution: mutual aid and abnegation are also factors and products. No pure knowledge is the enemy of religion. If Christ were dead it would be the Church that had slain Him, not the laboratory. But Christ is not dead. Christ lives, and countless souls will He yet save, and among them least, but not least suffering, how many of this generation! But He will not be your Christ, O Genro; He is more likely to stand by the barricade or at the sorrowful exit of the brothel than by the bishop. He will be anti-acquisitive, if He is nothing else, not because He is against the capitalist, but because He wishes to save the soul of the capitalist by forcing the capitalist to declare the capitalist colours, which are not necessarily those of the devil but are at least those of a man. Over social relations, too, a cowardly falsity at present persists. In Horseback Hall only a pretence of feudalism remains. The ancient owners are dispossessed by those who only play at feudalism, or, if they remain, are not in a position to keep the old system up or discover to their amaze that the old system is resented. As for the new owners who come down to hunt or shoot and depart to hunt or shoot or to manufacture or to conduct a

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banking business elsewhere, if the play ever turns earnest they discover themselves in an anomalous position: making money as capitalists, and trying to spend it as feudal lords. But the spending of money in a country district does not constitute feudal lordship, and, moreover, feudalism and modern capitalism are not at long last truly compatible. However, much abused, the most abused of all, as this class is, it is in many ways the best class—the “upper” Genro. We would rather, infinitely rather, be found in Horseback Hall than in Heartbreak House. Heartbreak House says it believes, and denies what it believes in its life. Horseback Hall has few ideas, and perhaps evil ideas, but it lives up to them—it believes in patronizing the poor in the country, and bullying them, if it can, in the town. Or it believes in its divine right (backed up by some misreading of history and science) of bullying them at all times and in all places. Or it believes (rarely) in co-operation, provided that the inhabitants of Horseback Hall are, as they are at home, always in the saddle. But the folk in Heartbreak House believe in nothing but self-indulgence. To them ideas are playthings, and the soul-searching cruelty of ideas is only a thrill or an anodyne under which they can escape from the hunger which devours their beings. Truly their hearts are broken—if they ever had any. There is only one cure for these—that is, to act. But they cannot, or will not, act—they believe in nothing sufficiently or in all things sufficiently to keep them in balanced

immobility save for flirtation with a new person or idea. But no one has truly possessed an idea until he or she has tried to live up to it. And you must live up to the idea for the idea's sake, not for the sensation you will feel in living up to it or the discovery of self in the process. And Heartbreak House believes in nothing but self-indulgence. It cannot purify its motives. And therefore its (rare) deeds do not possess integrity. It pays too much attention to heads and legs, and not enough to hearts. Horseback Hall is either brutal and never pretends to any sense of personal honour, or, possessing personal honour, lives up to that sense in a noble way—indeed, personal honour is the first characteristic of many inhabitants of Horseback Hall. Their standard of fair play is that of a public school boy's First Eleven, but they stick to it. They have, of course, made all the rules, and for them these are the only rules, however rough, if ready, these rules may be. But they live up to them, they banish from their midst those who do not live up to them. And they never desert those who keep them. There is courage and loyalty in Horseback Hall. Neither exists in Heartbreak House. But Horseback Hall is stupid, obstinate, prejudiced and selfish . . .

Therefore, says Youth, a plague on both your houses! Beware! We have lately handled machine-guns—we may soon handle brooms!

A sideways motion of the Figure-with-the-Eyes and the sound of a pant makes the member start
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to his feet. He will not be threatened. He advances on the Figure. But, when he bends over it, he perceives something curious, and, glancing scaredly about the great room in which he and the Figure are alone, he trembles from head to foot. The face, for all its wound, is the face of his own son. He takes the Figure by the coat as if to shake it, but lets go abruptly. Again the trembling seizes him—this time so powerfully that his teeth chatter in his head. For suddenly he realizes that the Youngest Member is in a trance—some dreadful interior conflict oppresses heart and brain—is dying—or already dead. With a terrible cry the member rushes out and can be heard filling the vestibule with his clamour: “A doctor! A doctor! I will give all I have for a doctor! Ah, doctor, doctor—quick, quick! He is my own son, my own flesh! With all his faults he has still something that I have not: he still has fight in him. Quick, quick, don’t say it’s too late! You have that which saves! You have that which saves! ”

Polite Query

Merely an allegory: but what I want to know is—is it too late?

The moral forces of Europe are running low. In England, the stablest country of them all, disillusionment, save perhaps in business circles (of which we hear too much), prevails. There arises no new Moral Factor. The scythe of Death, that spared so many weeds among good wheat, spared

not the wheat of the fullest ear. Of all those many, mocked before the War, those genii among the Captains, Lieutenants, and Second-Lieutenants, what number remains? There was your future! And where is it now? Under the ground, beneath the sea, or, if it lives, lying in the arm-chair with its eyes so curiously fixed upon the Member who has not yet put down his *Times*, much less read the Figure's eyes or run for the doctor. . . .

And meanwhile the light fades, the ground shakes. . . .

O Europe, Europe, who didst know Greece; for whom the death of an Eastern beggar engendered awhile the greatest moral force in history, binding the nations together so that they formed one vast cathedral, each class in its place in the mass of living stone, lifting its pinnacles like hands outstretched from darkness toward God; who, quarrying the statues of dead gods, didst chance once more upon the body of Prometheus and take from his hand the fire of knowledge and with this fire didst later recreate thy powers only to turn those powers to base uses and to the throes of ultimate battle nigh fatal to thee, what hope for thee is there to-day? Miserable art thou! With thine own hands hast thou put out thine eyes; with dust of gold has thou stopped thine ears. Corruption and doubt, the worm of corruption, have eaten thine heart. Greed and vanity, not God and bravery, compel thee!

The East that watches thee mocks thee with
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austere eyes, or, tainted with thy corruption, betrayed by thee and ready to repay treachery with treachery, prepares to strike thee down!

In all the world who shall save thee? Nothing without can save thee. Only ourselves can save ourselves. And thine own sons, who might have saved thee, hast thou put to the sword!

That Which Saves

What is that which saves?

It is to find a faith and to live by it and for it.

In England to-day what moral forces are at work? In all ages it is the minority who save, the passionate few. While the leader lives, who follow him? The passionate few. The majority never appreciate him as sincerely as they appreciate a second-rate man. We can only truly appreciate that which is akin to us. Were the leader merely as we, he would not lead. Because he is Prometheus, because the fire burns in his hand, the passionate few who recognize the fire follow him, endeavouring after their sort to become worthy of him, since the only remedy against a hopeless superiority is love toward the bearer of that fire which cleanses and saves. And the majority? When lies mouldering the six feet of what was once the engine of the most powerful force in the world, when the peace Prometheus has earned has closed over the darkened eyes and the holy head, the majority will accept him. Why? Because they have heard his name so often. Up, therefore: lead, or find a leader.

Sitting here in my room with the immortals open before me, "the crowned, the sceptred, whose voices this night chant a *gloria in excelsis* of passion and awe," I know that I am not, that I never shall be, a leader—indeed, vainglorious as I am, I never dreamed of it. But I am, I shall be ever—Prometheus aiding me—one of the passionate few. And I ask you, you remnant of those who went out at morning and at evening were not found, you who know that because of the sufferings behind Man, the sufferings of leaders and of the past passionate few, we owe mankind a life, have we the courage and integrity to persevere? Away with Hamlet and Don Juan: the Age of the Romanticism of Feeling is over and the Age of the Romanticism of Act begins! "For in this hour," cries Prometheus: "those who are not with me are against me. Who is on my side, who?"

Nightwatcher's Credo

Before the War we believed in something no man has seen: we believed in that England "not made with hands" of which it seems those who rule, those who are said to be moral leaders, for all their protestations, appear to know nothing. Is there in England to-day a man or woman dares, in the face of ridicule, in the hour of the Prince of This World, when cynicism is the only fashion and opportunism the only creed, to raise the banner, so patronizingly derided by the Old in their indifference, so bitterly by the Young in their despair, the banner of the Ideal?

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Search your hearts, discover that in which you still believe, if power is yet in you to believe. The bodies of our friends are scattered upon the ridges, upon the deserts, or sunk "deeper than ever plummet sounded" beneath the squall-smitten seas. Yet sometimes as I lie here, unable for the heat and weight of the nightwatches to find sleep, overwhelmingly separated from the few that are left me, I discover myself not so alone as oftentimes by day under the terrible sun I persuade myself that I am. Towards dawn, when the trees about the house are utterly still, when the watchman has ended his last round, I hear rise from the woods of distant France, from the scaurs of the Balkans, from the sand-flats of Mesopotamia, from beneath the surges of forgotten Coronel, the mysterious chanting of an immaterial England's dead—

Blessed be those who for her sake have died,
Blessed be those who for her sake shall live! ¹

The First Move

In the furtherance of this Moral Renaissance what comes first?—so be it that these poor fumbling words, ill messengers of tangled and disjointed thoughts, the product of feverish reverie, fall not on deaf ears. Search your hearts, O passionate few! In what do we still believe? It is not yet too late. The Youngest Member, whose eyes were

¹ *Io benedico chi per lei cadea,
Io benedico chi per lei vivrà!*

Il Canto Dell' Amore—Carducci.

so fixed in trance, who beheld that conflict within "like a phantasma or a hideous dream" may yet emerge from his trance to live to others and not die in himself. What have we? We have first the chance of a solidarity—if we care to recognize it—psychological, social, and economic. Few of us are rich. That is by no means, perhaps, a disadvantage. Socially we do not care the faintest damn for any man. To us the individual is merely a person either with us or against us. With the Labour Party and the Aristocrats, it is true, we find ourselves in difficulties: both are suspicious of us. We have no class interests. Like scientists and artists, we are outside class. But the Aristocrats will go—not that they ever paid us any attention, save when we happened to be simultaneously under the roof of Heartbreak House—and Labour is coming to discover its need of us. For Labour *does* need us, and will need us more. Labour has long been hungry, and, with perfect justice behind cold calculation, has been bargaining for bread. Hunger casts out all other emotions—as some of us have discovered on the march. But, with a fuller stomach, other desires begin to make themselves felt. Those desires can, in Bertrand Russell's terms, be "possessive" or "creational": a Ford car or a faith. Man cannot live by bread alone. If they ask us for our faith, what shall we say? Finally, and chiefly, there is the psychological factor.

The habit which Science has brought, oh, ever so unperceived by those in public life and by the

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Genro, of trying to think impartially and of admitting every kind of evidence even while scrutinizing it with a severity that has been traduced by interested parties, makes for solidarity since it causes those who compose this Young Intelligencia to exchange their ideas with no other object in view but to find a common basis on which all agree, the criterion of which shall be evident truth, not policy or the interests of a *bloc*. And why is this? Because the sincerity of to-day is the direct first result of science coming unquestioned into daily life. Though the later Victorian age considered itself scientific, it was, as a matter of fact, nothing of the sort. Both Science and anti-Science were too narrow. There were too many battles—some of them over supposititious conflicts. The Kantian preoccupation with the rational informed those desperate, valiant, and occasionally disgraceful days. With the coming of Neo-Darwinism and the Pragmatists a rarer, wider light began to shine. For whether you approve of Neo-Darwinism or Pragmatism or no, you cannot deny that both make for tolerance. And in true knowledge there can be no room for war to the death.

A Play as Touchstone

Apart from the fact of "seeing" the material of this play as the germ of a work of art, I have written it, as stated above, "to satisfy certain needs of my own, which are not without their bearing on the question of for whom it was written."

I wish to discover, by any reverberations this work may set up, whether I am alone. I wish this play, such as it is, if it succeeds in the mission of every work of art—that is, of deepening consciousness—to discover among whom it deepens it. The Christianity of this play is of the cruellest and most violent kind. I “saw” it after this fashion, and therefore was compelled to write it after this fashion. But had I not been compelled, had I not envisaged the factors engaged after this fashion and no other, if I had been creating, as no artist can create, by pure intellect alone without inner revelation, I would still have made it thus. The brand of Christianity would still have been of the most violent, crude, and uncompromising variety—not, it is true, uncompromising in a sense that might be used by the Greek or Roman Church, but uncompromising in the sense that it would insist, as Pascal (who at the time the drama was being composed swayed me) insists, that “Between us and hell or heaven there is nothing but the life that is between the two, which is the frailest thing in the world”; that we must wager on the existence or non-existence of God; that if He exists for us His commands exist for us and we must serve Him . . . and if He exists not we must take the responsibility of doing exactly what we like, being perfectly prepared to commit any crime, care we to do so, since to refuse is to prove ourselves irrational and cowardly. To this extent, then, I wish to make the play a touchstone. The religion of this play, though it

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seems to me to contain much that must logically follow from the teachings of Christ, is, of course, not the only Christianity, and certainly makes no claim to be the only possible present-day religion. In point of fact it is not even the religion of the man who made it, though to some extent it was so once. But, as I say, it is a test. I am glad that it is put in this violent form, because I wish to see whether others and what others of my age are sensible of religion in its violent form. I do not say that it is better or worse to feel things in this manner—indeed, I begin to doubt whether the kind of introspective violence displayed by certain of the characters in this play is sufficiently constructive to afford a basis for more than the personal redemption of a rare and perhaps not altogether Promethean type. For in this religion there is no little of the fakir. Such as it is, however, is not beyond the bounds of possibility and hope to believe that it may provoke more immediate realization of the need of “that which saves,” and, second, a research, such as I have spoken of above, as to what, in the religious sense, the Selfish Young do yet believe. For they stand very definitely challenged, not so much by the Genro as by the needs of the time, to discover in what sense that title is applicable. Do they glory in it? Is it, when they are pushed to a fundamental declaration, their religion, this Selfishness, as it was Max Stirner’s, as with modifications it has been the creed of many eminent men? Or do they disavow it? And, if so, what is their creed?

For if they think they are beyond religion I take leave to doubt them, as the Genro—albeit in a muddleheaded way (calling on them to declare for squarsonry, the chapel, Mrs. Eddy, Sir Oliver Lodge, or the Ingersoll Free Thought Platform)—have doubted them. Religion exists, and has existed since the dawn of human intelligence. It does not persist, save in the process of evolution. You cannot limit evolution. Either all evolves or nothing. It remains to be seen whether the Young are under the impression that they have thrown religion overboard. That, I need hardly say, I do not think they can do. Stirnerism itself is a creed—a poor, narrow, vinegary sort of creed in my opinion, nevertheless a creed. But they may profess they have thrown religion overboard. If so, I shall be altogether amazed and confounded, since I hazard we are not present at the death of many old religions but at the birth of one more new, or, as usual, of an old one—perhaps in the deepest deep of the only one—in a new body. To me religion represents a force working in life, the product of evolution and necessary to its continuance, a force that carries and propagates a knowledge that is scarcely translatable in present terms of the rational, something akin to an instinct, perhaps the consciousness of the direction of the evolutionary stream itself, a consciousness which is most often (as possibly at present) associated with those forces in evolution that make, in principle, for unity, mutual aid, and even renunciation, rather than for conflict: forasmuch as religion, on the

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whole, would seem to tend toward an effort at coagulation, the strifes it has engendered between peoples or between individuals and the herd being rather occasioned by conflicts of would-be unifying forces than of purely disintegration-seeking forces. Alas! I am not a philosopher, and have had no philosophic or even scientific training. I find definition of this sort excessively difficult. Perhaps a sympathetic and quicker brain than mine will perceive what I am straining at and express it—if it has not been expressed: and I have nowhere yet seen it expressed—in a manner of which I am not at present capable. Claud Bragdon is quoted as asserting in his *Fourth Dimensional Vistas*, a book I have not yet been able to procure and the value of which I have no means of ascertaining, that “there is more and more evident an increasing pressure upon consciousness from a new direction.” This increasing pressure may be what we know as religion, for I take it that this Fourth Dimension cannot be outside the evolutionary stream. To me, at least, there was perceptible a sort of reaching out, very difficult to define, in the minds of those a little while ago about me toward something which for want of a better name I will call a religion. And here in Japan, when I questioned one of America’s greatest religious leaders, two facts especially struck me in his conversation—the first was that his views, when he was not in the presence of “weaker brethren,” were almost identical with those of William James, only that he had obviously undergone some religious

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illumination such as James did not experience; the second a matter of some curiosity, namely, his assertion that at Harvard last year he had come into contact with a group of young men who were seeking religion, as it were, by empirical methods. This last fact touched me close.

And what has all this to do with the writing of a particular play?

It has this to do—that herein are treated the spiritual experiences of one of this generation. For had I not suffered particular experiences this play had not been written. It is the peculiarity of these experiences and the extraordinary validity that, for me at least, attaches to the conclusions that then came to consciousness and the general result to which they lead that prompts me to suppose that this work of art, such as it is, may possess an interest other than æsthetic to my contemporaries. On that possible interest I do not wish the play to be judged. The play should be judged sheerly as a work of art. And yet some considerations of the theme and its relation to a supposed irreligious generation may not be out of place. As an aid to such a consideration, in case the play (after it has been judged as a work of art) should arouse the interest a document possesses, I purpose to record some of the motives which preceded the perception of the theme as the germ of a work of art. The interest for me exists in the sudden appreciation of the fact that, as far as I am concerned, religion in its (as far as I have been able to gather by comparison) most profound,

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or at any rate most obscure, form is so far from being in any sense dead that it may be said, for one at least, to possess a peculiar, a positively eruptional "liveliness." Considering the play, then, for the purpose of this part of the preface only as a document, I propose to record what in a moment I shall record to the end—that others, provided with the appropriate data, may take what line they choose in the matter, either declaring me outside their number or most definitely of it.

Why, oh, why be so Painfully Indiscreet?

First, however, let it be understood that I put forward this record of experience with no desire to draw attention to myself. My aim is to draw attention to my generation and to draw my generation's attention to a matter which, I consider, it has peradventure somewhat prematurely dismissed or would seem to have dismissed. For it appears to me that, so far from religion being dismissed, the Young have not even properly investigated (that is, in the case of religions, to investigate through personal experience) the religion which, in the West, lies nearest to hand: Christianity. I do not record what I record to prove that I am better or worse or deeper than anybody else, young or old. The record forms merely, as it were, notes to a document in the event of the play coming to be considered, apart from its intrinsic value as a work of art.

The autobiography of the Young is often of

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interest, but almost invariably of a certain tiresomeness. I shall therefore be brief. I ask the reader to bear in mind that the purpose of the record is as above, and is not intended as an indulgence in egoism on my part. It is because I am by way of working that we may get beyond our present egos that I record it.

Uncalled-for Autobiography of an Unlicked Pup

At twelve years old I had a bout of religiosity—one could not style it religion. I considered myself lonely in the world, and Jesus Christ, who was of a somewhat tearful disposition, as my particular friend. In order to realize his pains more acutely I remember lying awake as long as I could with my arms outstretched and inserted in the iron girders of the bed until sleep supervened. This I remember as the crisis of that phase, a phase which ended abruptly when the headmaster was changed and one less kindly, less comprehending, and less, in the simplest and deepest sense, Christian took his place. I remember no more religious or pseudo-religious emotions until at a Public School the day of Confirmation approached. Then I recollect undertaking a pretty comprehensive—an only too comprehensive—scheme of religion. I set about confessing my misdemeanours on the understanding that no action would be taken. No action was taken, and the headmaster was sympathetic. He asked me what I cared about in life; I promptly replied, “poetry.” Thereupon he recited “Shall
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I compare thee to a summer's day? " So beautifully did he recite it, and so overwhelmed was I at finding one who understood poetry in the sense that I understood it, over whose grave, benign face there ran no shadow of a smile at my enthusiasm, that I burst into tears, and I verily believe that in that moment I might have been converted to any creed whatsoever the good man had cared to propose had he understood how to take advantage of the situation. To this day I cannot think of him without devotion. But when I returned to my House it was not long before I perceived, having bared my breast of its poor misdemeanours to my Housemaster as I felt bound to do, being by way of getting "square" as I called it on all points with life, that I was under surveillance. To-day I am persuaded that the surveillance was perhaps the master's duty, for I was then extraordinarily restless and possessed of such a violent passion of hate for my school as I have since never experienced for any institution or person; and it is not altogether impossible that this restlessness and abomination of nearly everything accounted sacred in my House might have proved catching. For I was an astute little beast with my tongue. Confirmation Day came—a farce. First Communion came—another farce. On the evening of that Sunday I tore my white tie off and shred it viciously with scissors and swore undying hate to all that I took it to represent. I was a humourless pup. Should I not have known that spiritual enlightenment is

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not a proper part of the education of English gentlemen, of those youths who are destined, particularly destined in my school, to become the consuls and pro-consuls of the widest and most varied empire, having beneath its control heaven knows how many creeds, the world has ever seen? Alas, for the English Public School! I learned a highly irregular lesson of that institution: namely, that one has a right to one's own soul, and that not the devil himself can annex that right.

Nearly two years of defiance followed, then I tired . . . and considered I would give religion another chance. I went to Communion. One day a young Jew asserted to my face that I went because certain handsome girls knelt beside me at the rails. I knocked him down. But afterwards I recalled the beating of my heart as I approached the altar and the fact that I certainly did feel more changed in heart, crammer's dull scamp that I was, when particular girls were present. From that day to this I have never partaken of the Sacrament. Misery and revolt descended again. For, if I have learned nothing else in my twenty-eight years, I have learned that one can be more miserable before one is twenty than those of over twenty can very well understand. Later sorrows and pains may be deeper and more desolating: none are so acute and so forlorn.

Then one summer morning while we were looking at the serene sea an acquaintance remarked, "How perfect it is! It's good to be alive this morning!"

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I had never, inelastic, blind, goblin-ridden creature, thought of things after that fashion. In five minutes I was on the way to a change. I felt a sort of joy I had never known—an essentially for me religious, a holy joy. I loved and forgave everybody. The world seemed perfect. The mood endured. I must have been then just seventeen.

But it was mere innocent enjoyment of health. There was no idea in it, no conscious delight in things or cultivation of delight. Delight simply was. I didn't seek to be "good" or to be "bad." All that was lovely surrounded me like the waves of a song floating, on a still, happy, and sunny morning, from a further room. I neither courted nor repulsed the loveliness, and it had no effect on my conduct, which somehow continued overcast and disorganized by what appeared to me the inexplicable requirements of my elders and my circumstances. For instance, I wished to be what they would call "lazy." I hated learning Latin and Greek. I didn't dispute their right to try and make me do so—only these preoccupations of theirs didn't seem to me to have any bearing on the essential me. All that was outside what I somehow dimly felt to be essential, and what seemed essential was to be as I was—possessed of a sort of profound and holy happiness. The devils only appeared, and I only gave way to them when I was required to be "good" after others' fashion, not after my own. A year later I discovered music, and after music the drama, and on

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top of both I read Richard Jefferies' *Story of my Heart*. In one day I seemed to spring up complete from top to toe. Everything that Jefferies put forward in this book, which I still consider profound and beautiful and necessary reading for every growing girl or boy, seemed to me the very truth of truth. No book, save one, ever made such a deep impression on me as this.

I was eighteen when I read Richard Jefferies. I turned, if I may put so bold and ambitious a name upon it, consciously pagan in a day. Day and night during the time that I was ceasing to be a boy, day and night when I found myself and became a youth, day and night to the very brink of the war, the ideas of Richard Jefferies were my ideas. During those three years I lived a prodigious life: indeed, I may say that I had had no sense of real personality until that period, and that I regard the self I then discovered as basically my essential self. My life became a miracle to me. By day I discovered the world, colour, light, the wind, the freshening of the waves, intoxication of the senses and of the soul; by night, reading into forbidden hours, the spirit and mind of man disclosed themselves to me in an extraordinary hotch-potch of books that ranged from W. B. Maxwell to Flaubert. Especially I cultivated all that was considered "gloomy" and "morbid." I had a taste for the bitter—the sign in the young of a healthy soul. "For if this is the truth," I said, "let me have it. My religion is to experience all—very well, then, let me have the worst, so that

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I do not deceive myself with artificial paradises! ”

This desire to experience, to know and to be, was definitely religious. It affected my conduct. For the advocacy of ideas (somewhat crudely apprehended) in season and out of season with its attendant humiliations (just and unjust) and the moods of spiritual plenty and spiritual dryness attendant on living up to such a creed of truth-seeking and truth-propagation can definitely be termed, I think, a phase of religious life. As for any sort of orthodox religion, more particularly of any sort of Christianity, I regarded myself as outside it. It simply didn't exist for me. I wasn't even—save when irritated by the actual physical presence of the orthodox—a rare occurrence—the enemy of it. It was altogether abolished, and I stood up real and whole and myself at last. No sort of malady of the soul could touch me: often tired, dispirited, even despairing, as I was, I was never sick. On the evening of my twenty-first birthday I finally decided, privately persuaded that I would certainly be killed, to join the army. Under my pillow that night lay the book I had carried always with me for more than two years ere war broke out—*Servitudes et Grandeurs Militaires* of Alfred de Vigny. Paganism, ceasing to be self-indulgent (if self-educational), became extraordinarily intensified. I perceived a chance to exercise pagan virtues in the position of a soldier—a mercenary who, suffering and dying, remains a non-political individual granted the opportunity of

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making something of his soul through fortitude and silence. That year of training is the happiest I have so far experienced. I had everything (save one) the heart could possibly desire—the sky over me, beautiful horses, loyal companions in the men, an officer whom I intensely admired as my major, a definite and, in its way, noble creed—for I never thought of killing: if ever I thought of the future I was merely certain that I should be killed. And, except for the grief it would occasion my kin and the grief I felt at passing from them and the old house in which I had been brought up, I didn't really much care. Such a torrent of life possessed me as I had never known: "*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very Heaven!*"

And in all this there was a glorious sense of religion entirely unlike any of the dim, confused memories of a soul once sick, of something called "sin," of "repentance," of any possible need of that which saves. "That which saves?" What saves? A clean sword and a clean heart. So on an officer's ride, cantering into a coppice (thus do I recall the doings of that romantic, absurd, and yet somewhat enviable youth), I halted, drew my tailor's tinsmith weapon in an aisle where none could spy, lifted it flashing toward the sunbeam, cried "*Ich Dien!*" and brought it to my lips. I wonder if I shall ever be as happy again. Every age has, of course, the happiness appropriate to it. But, ah, just to be such a triumphant and high-hearted fool once again!

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And I went to the war. It didn't take long to finish me. As I stood on a hop-clad hill outside a Rest Station before I was invalided to England I suddenly became aware of a world fallen lopsided, of men suffering and making others suffer. I had not thought of that. I had pictured horror for myself, but not for others. The vision vanished as soon as I became sensible of it. My eye turned inward once more. I lived again and again the overpowering, exultant sensation that had visited me when inwardly compelled to observe our fire on the German line in a manner exposing me more than was necessary or even sane. As in a reeling dream I experienced once more the fierce if only temporary conviction that the essential "I" was immortal, that a bullet might split my head but could not expugn my spirit from Life, that I was due to go on experiencing in ever widening circles through eternal aeons. Then I completely broke down and was sent home.

There I encountered serious trouble. But my eye was still bent inward. No one seemed to exist except myself. I continued a pagan, if a less riotous and more grimly determined pagan. As for Christianity, there was a demand for man to endure for others. Well, paganism had its heroes too. Passivity I abhorred. You fight and, if necessary, die for what you believe in: that is not an exclusively Christian tenet. Anti-Christ also bears our cross. I didn't hate the Germans. They thought a civilization could be imposed. We, the older peoples, considered it could only be induced.

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We were fighting for toleration, and in that sense were fighting and dying for man, and in that sense could be called Christians. (This last idea I endeavoured to enshrine in a poem called *Battery Moving Up from Rest Camp*.) But in any other sense I was not Christian. I continued, while dissatisfied with myself, satisfied with my mode of treating life and of expanding myself. It never even struck me that it is possible to damage others by living up to such a creed, nor that, as a friend later pointed out to me, one can't be and have everything, that certain modes of life are mutually exclusive in that a man who has been an Antony cannot become an Aucassin—that, in short, the past as it affects the personality is to some extent immutable, and of all things a habit of selfishness most immutable. For I had at that time no consideration whatever for others.

And then, suddenly, without any kind of warning, it happened: something that the griefs and joys I have tried to record in *Ardours and Endurances* had not effected, something that was not due to the death of any friend or to any particular violent affection. I connect with it only one fact—that for a long time my feeling for Nature had been on the wane, since I seemed unable to return to an enjoyment of her aloof from men, whom I perceived to be tearing to pieces each other in a necessary or unnecessary battle.

It happened in the train, while travelling down

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to stay at a house on the river. At the bookstall at Paddington I had bought a copy of the *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, induced so to do solely by the fact that Edward Pusey, who had based this translation of his on a version of Watts, was related to my mother's family. I well remember holding the book with some misgiving, wondering if it contained anything that could possibly appeal to me. Arthur Symons had written about it, hadn't he? But that was in a volume of Symons which I did not possess. Arthur Symons wouldn't waste that marvellous gustatory faculty of his on rubbish, to be sure. That he should care to appraise this man's work was probably proof that I should find something of interest to me in it.

We had drawn out of the immediate suburbs, and I had been alone some ten minutes in my compartment, when I commenced to turn the leaves, finally smoothed the page and began, by what chance or miracle I know not, precisely at this passage, which is the twenty-seventh chapter of the tenth book:

Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! too late loved I Thee! And, behold, Thou wert within, and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee; deformed I, plunging amid those fair forms, which Thou hast made. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not at all. Thou calledst and shoutedst and burstest my deafness. Thou flashedst, shonest, and scatteredst my blindness. Thou breathedst odours, and I drew in my breath and did pant for Thee. I tasted and do hunger and thirst for Thee. Thou didst touch me and I burned for Thy peace. . . .

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The empty carriage spun before my eyes. A terrible void, wherein fluttered a joy so intense and precarious that I feared it would vanish even as I felt it, seemed to open in my breast. My senses ached and my head grew dizzy. I read on:

Because I am not full of Thee I am a burden to myself . . . Woe is me! Lord have pity on me . . . Thou art the Physician, I the sick; Thou merciful, I miserable . . . All my hope is nowhere but in Thy exceeding great mercy. Give what Thou enjoimest and enjoin what Thou wilt.

I became aware of the most frightful possible consequences, of demands to be made of me which I could never fulfil and from which I could not retire, of an unmerciful something bent on breaking my heart. The very floor of the carriage seemed to open under my feet and I became sensible of myself as leaning over the mouth of hell, as over a smooth black chute down which we slide in the sarcophagus of the blind body; and, lifting up my eyes with an immense effort, for it was as if the weight of a huge hand were laid on my head, I felt an all but inaccessible heaven opening above me. With a miraculous certitude, which has since left me but at stray moments, I perceived that in ourselves we are saved, that only ourselves can save ourselves, that we are our own seducers, judges, and executioners, and that in the most literal sense "*Now* is the hour of salvation." And though I feared I hardly knew what, though I understood that everything I thought I believed in must perish, that I must give up every in-

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dulgence and, what was worse, every love, and what was worst of all, the hope of a human love, of a woman's love somehow and somewhere to come were I so bidden and thus suffer my heart to be broken, yet I called out "Break it *now!* Break it *now!*" For I feared the moment would pass. Nothing happened, save that my senses veered and spun with exactly the same sickening sensation, only apparently in darkness, as do the senses of a novice in an aeroplane when it banks for the first time. In desperation I read on till I came to "too little doth he love Thee who loves anything with Thee which he loveth not for Thee!"

Then my ears rang, a gigantic flood seemed to gather to my head, and the floor was like a wave crested with light. It began in my breast, it rushed into my head, I felt it in my hands and down to my very feet. I was taken with a vertigo. I remember the book falling. I remember kneeling. I remember the train rocking. When I recovered from this depth and confusion, which was followed by a sort of white obliteration; when it, whatever it was, had had its way with me and settled into every niche of my being, I remember I found myself sitting in the corner feeling exceedingly weak and overwhelmingly tired but happy in a humble sort of way. Beads of rain brightened the window—we were nearing the Thames—and tears came into my eyes because they were so beautiful and I so happy. From that day something was changed in me. I have never

been quite the same since. But I am not Christian, save in the most general sense. Awhile I dabbled in Christianity, since I was brought to the conclusion that my generation had dismissed it in far too summary a fashion: for which the churches and the conventions are largely to blame. I perceived that religion is a personal thing, and that it cannot be judged entirely objectively if it is to be understood. And so I settled down to try and induce it to work. This was a great struggle. It meant the surrender of pride and the surrender of reason. I took to reading regular prayers, to bodily penalties and mental mortifications. I read incessantly in Job, St. Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, St. Francis, Pascal, and . . . after a while, in Tolstoy. I do not know if I ever succeeded in making any real abnegation of my reason, or even of my pride. I think probably not. It occurred to me that this revelation, if such I dared term it, though occasioned by reading in a Christian book need not be considered of necessity exclusively Christian in substance. The passivity of Christianity, the taint of the fakir was what I abhorred. And there seemed to be for me—how shall I express it?—a kind of selfishness, a queer preoccupation about some of these Christians: “O how great a confidence shall we have at the hour of death, whom no affection to anything detaineth in the world . . . he that desireth to walk freely with Me, it is necessary that he mortify all his corrupt and inordinate affections, and that he should not earnestly cleave to any liv

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creature with particular love!" Thus spake Thomas à Kempis in the fifty-third chapter of his Third Book. I found it a cruel saying. Moreover, the supposed antagonism of flesh and spirit was more than I could swallow. I had but to think of Richard Jefferies, Walt Whitman, and George Meredith, not to speak of Titian and Phidias, abruptly to conclude that in the severer forms of Christianity a kind of barbarism revealed itself: the perversion of the cenobite or the mujik. And, in any event, what were they doing? "Laying up treasures in Heaven"—ultimate salvation gleamed like a schoolchild's picnic party at the end of the vista. The idea of the Resurrection had always seemed to me ridiculous. It seems so now. It seemed so then; the more so since the "revelation" had insisted that we are saved or lost now, and that in consciousness of the moment's choice taken, of the irretrievable ruin or joy that we establish for ourselves minute by minute, lies our heaven or hell. Surely living up to the idea from minute to minute was what counted!—to-morrow is not our affair, and not God Himself can overthrow integrity. And what was God in any event? Certainly not a Trinity who dealt rewards or punishments: for we ourselves do that through the instrument of a consciousness that from moment to moment declares our slavery in self or our freedom in idea, which can never be satisfied, and regards spiritual satisfaction as spiritual, mental, and moral death. I came to the conclusion that the cenobite and the fakir were altogether

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too much set on saving their souls: not the saving mattered, but the process of saving. And, as so often before, the words of Goethe translated by Charles Sorley thunderously smote the consciousness and diffused that, for me, one only and undying truth I have discovered in my life and by which I have come to live

Yea, in this thought lies my whole life's persistence,
This is the sum total of the true;
He only earns his Freedom, owns Existence
Who every day must conquer them anew! ¹

Like the dancing dervish, we proceed forward by circles. Even thus, though dimly, had Richard Jefferies for all his nihilism spoken. Even thus did Shelley speak now:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power which seems omnipotent;
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, to falter, nor repent
This, like thy glory Titan, *is* to be
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free;
This *is* alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

And of whom, in the sublimest lyric words that were ever phrased in the English tongue, was that

¹ *Ja! Diesem sinne bin ich ganz ergeben,
Dast ist der Weisheit letzter schluss:
Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,
Der täglich sie erobern muss.*

Faust, Part II: Act V.—Goethe.

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voice singing? Of Prometheus. Prometheus became the symbol of my god and has remained the symbol of my god. But the word god is misleading. It has a taint of the fetish and of nonsense words such as the Absolute. What concerned me?—to serve the Promethean in life. Did my own soul need final salvation? Suffice that it needed to experience the sense of “that which saves” now—that is, in every minute of waking existence between this hour and the grave. Had this idea anything of “that which saves”? It had. Was I to consider the final totting up at all, or what the scheme of all things might signify with regard to my personal destiny hereafter? No: I was to serve the idea. In service during the successive minutes is salvation. But what form of service? What were other men and women doing? I did not know. What were other men and women? I did not know. I had not even been interested in them save as they ministered to the expansion of my soul. They had been something with which you explored your own personality, which you used or exploited to satisfy your own needs and greeds. I had thought I was a man, as Prometheus was Man, and behold I was a mere little monster! But to be “interested” in man—what a coldblooded proceeding! To understand him, it was said, you must first love him. The world darkened. “Nature” had long ceased to be my paradise. For there is as much nature inside a house as outside it. You cannot divide Nature into trees which are spirits, such dryads

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as are the symbols of the Earth-God, and into tables, chairs, and footstools, which are but mere blocks of wood. Wordsworth, the mystic of "Nature," was become a sentimental driveller, the more so since any crowded wood provided the wanderer with the spectacle of an intense silent and terrible combat to the death for light and air, while the true Wordsworth, the heroic friend of man, though he sympathized with man, seemed to remain curiously remote in his fastness from the actual stench, loud badinage, and elbow-jolting of the crowd. Wordsworth, then, loved man, but seemed to love him on a small but sufficient income and from a distance. The word Humanity rose like the lucid and entirely vacuous exhalation of the minds of tiresome, completely inhuman humans. Humanity?—a sociologist's dream, begotten of soda-water and a vegetable diet after a glorious day among the statistics. But Shelley . . . ? And so I stood in the desert of a Nature turned hostile, having on my one hand a Chimera known as Humanity, and on my other an indifferent and, as far as I could see, distinctly unlovable Sphinx recognizable as my Next Door Neighbour. Oh, one liked people, of course, but ah, how soon one tired of them! Goethe, with that wise smile of his, half compassion and half disdain, so curiously beguiling to me, so irritating to my Next Door Neighbour possessed of the Greater Simpler Truths, had remarked, "A man cannot live for every one; least of all for those with whom he would not care to live!" Imbe-
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cility is not a passport to affection. And yet how outrageously true I felt, and feel, it to be that no man can be considered wholly wise who has not learned to forgive what he considers the mediocrity of his fellows. Was it mediocrity? Alas, look at the world! Read the highly-reputed newspaper run by Lord Alfred Bouvard for the consumption of Mr. and Mrs. Pecuchet-Smith! Surely it must be enough in an artist to see them as they are. No, no: it cannot be necessary to love them. Think of the cretin dwarfs of Velasquez, of *Don Sebastian de Morra*, *El Tonto de Coria*, of *El Niño de Vallecas*. Has the artist loved them or hated them, or even experienced compassion or contempt for them? No, he has simply and serenely once and for all time *seen* them. And yet to understand my contemporary, the Man in the Street, just as pitiable and hideous to me as these "hombres de placer," it was said to be necessary to love him! Could one, in any case, learn to love him? Perhaps it was his errors that after all made the midget-monster lovable? Is such love teachable? The soul of a Rembrandt is born with a Rembrandt. And yet Dostoievsky was said to have learned . . . or was it that somehow he had come to love? If so, I was suspicious: to come to love through despair, through indifference! A gesture characteristic of the fakir. I remembered the coffee-coloured eyes, the faint smile, the tenderness, that was more than half tiredness and contempt, in the face of a small stooping man shuffling round an evening party,

the name of that man being Anatole France. Ah, no: not that! not that! anything but that! Now and here and for ever one must not cease to care. When one ceases to care one dies: one becomes a hateful, horse-faced, smiling mummy!

Illumination shone then. I *did* care. And that caring was guarantee that it was possible to love one's neighbour, that in very truth I did love him. I opened *The Idiot* again. Pathological? what matter? Art and character are judged by their fruits. Only Max Nordau, eminent Philistine from Judea, judges otherwise. My own "revelation" might be considered solely from a pathological point of view as an access of mental confusion and disturbance. But it had worked. I had begun to create in my own life and in art once more. Nature adjusts herself: all invention has perhaps been due to an unconscious effort of the mind to enable its possessor to rank himself alongside the physically efficient. For the word Pathology I cared not two straws—it was one with the watchwords of the Oversane—"Good Taste," "A Sense of Humour," "Morbid." For the sane man, who possesses the *mens sana in corpore sano* of the English Public School's doctor or master's requirements, is so eminently sane that incessantly to be surrounded by examples of him is to share the fate of that unfortunate caretaker shut up for the night in the wax-work show only to be found, poor fellow, the morning after, dead on the floor, having battered himself to pieces against the hard bodies of those dolls

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whose eminent sanity of stare had driven him out of his mind.

Looking in to the face of Prince Muishkin, "refined but quite colourless, very fair, with a thin pointed and very light-coloured beard eyes large and blue with an intent look about them," I recognized his affinity with Parsifal, the bells of Montsalvat at that time first unforgettably sounding in my ears. It was the fashion then to laugh at *Parsifal*—the briefest conversations with young musicians assured me of this—and Prince Muishkin was out of favour: the war and the Russian Revolution, I was informed, had killed him. But for me he lived, and, by the light which shone in his face ere he fell in convulsions, I knew him for the everlasting enemy of the Mummy which smiles with such heart-rending sadness and such unforgivable mirth in the security and comfort of the darkness in which it abides. To this extent, then, Muishkin was Promethean. But I was conscious of a certain anaemia in the figure of the Prince. He, even as Parsifal, was too much an abstract spirit; though I could not be conscious that there must be an evolutionary significance in the fact that towards their lives' close the two mightiest art-creators of the last century had both put forward a singular combination of spontaneity and passivity as the ideal figure. Parsifal, however, seemed, to say the least, not overburdened with intellect, and Muishkin, I observed, is made to live almost entirely without his "surface mind," thus to some extent abolishing a

threatened cleavage in personality. Trust is all that would seem necessary to Muishkin. Could I, should I trust? Well, there was this to be said for the attitude—that Goethe bade us turn our eyes outward. And to trust is indeed a matter of turning the eyes outward.

Wordsworth, Velasquez, Anatole France, Dostoevsky, Wagner, Goethe—what a collection! Names, names, names. It is the weight of the past, not the hope of the future, that creates the spirit of Bolshevism. Information is too plentiful and too stale. Let us destroy it and begin anew. Bolshevism itself stale and a fraud: a spoiled child. Consult the oracles. But one is tired of oracles. Artists, artists, artists: teachers too, I suppose, but what of it? Turn your eyes outward. Yonder is a self-important little man walking with his bowler tilted over his nose because the sun dazzles his eyes. Is it the sunlight makes him appear divine? Let us be rid of poetry—particularly other people's. Some other poet had gilded him for me—that damnable homunculus across the way. And yet, three steps on there was a girl stretching and laughing as she yawned: inexplicable and beautiful until she leered at me. But for all that, three years before, in the Charing Cross Road, I had seen a sister of hers pick yet another sister in the profession, stinking tipsy and draggled as that sister was, out of the gutter and steer her past the policeman. Well, one must begin with what one knows or with those whom one may get to know and who may have something

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of whatever one has oneself. The Unanimistes beckoned until on a luckless noon, after I had begun to write poems of recognition, Roger Fry remarked, with that disarming innocence of his, that the group at the Abbey had fallen to pieces *before the war*.

What remained now but vague Internationalism and a few friends? And was "Clarté" Internationalism? Wasn't there a spice of provinciality in "Clarté's" superiority? Could my man under the bowler and other men under bowlers in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, America, ultimately come to be better loved and understood through "Clarté"? I doubted it. And friends? Was one, perhaps, a little crazy to them?—certainly they could hear too much of one tune, which, moreover, even the best were prone to take for a highly effective solo cornet recital, relieving to the giver, moving to the hearer. Hell and damnation!—we had not been brought up to our misfortune among the inhabitants of Heartbreak House for nothing! And I sat down, again alone, pen in hand, to write my first play, *Guilty Souls*, to try to create a work of art out of something "seen," incidentally to review possibilities and even at long last to come into touch, if not with friends, with a group so be that I am not found behind my generation, outside or beyond it.

I have given this fragment of autobiography because I feel it may have a significance for my companions. I do not desire to draw attention to my own struggles—they have ended in poor

enough fruit, heaven knows! I am sometimes ashamed when I think what little use I have made of that huge force in whose grip I once was. But now I am not at all sure whether I have not been right in letting it almost entirely go. I should perhaps have finished as a monk. Yet, however this may be, the experience, whatever it was, and the counsel of a friend, Doctor K——, have convinced me that to live in oneself and for oneself is not enough. He possesses but a small world who sees it only with his own eyes. Christianity has done that for me. There are whole worlds of experience which those who pass Christianity, even in its most orthodox forms, provided they be personally experienced, lightly by must miss. More than ever I feel convinced that we are on the brink of a great religious age, perhaps the greatest religious age the world has known, an age in which the idea of service, at such a critical stage of human evolution, will reach a height hitherto unguessed.

A Play, Art, and Life

It seems to me that we need a restatement of possibilities. This drama is the first of these restatements so far as I am concerned in them. But I did not undertake this work in order to restate, still less in order in any way to preach. I made it because, as artists say, I "saw" it. The artist sees the germ: that germ contains the whole work. I have "worked" nothing "in" that was not implicit in the germ. I hope that in time I

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shall "see" other things which will form germs for other dramas such as may contain restatements of possibilities. But I shall follow art, not preaching. The great thing in the drama is to be able to create living human beings. I care more about human beings and endeavouring to create them in a convincing manner than about anything they believe or do not believe. The aim of art is to deepen consciousness by creating a working thought-model in the concrete of some section of the universe. In that working thought-model all the laws concerned in that section, not a selection only of them, must be displayed. Your artist, no less than your scientist, must be absolutely impartial. It is not his business to draw conclusions. Just so many conclusions, good or bad, can be drawn from a work of art as from life. Art is neither immoral nor moral. It is simply amoral as life is amoral. To the extent that the artist sets about creating it in a spirit that is not impartial will it be moral or immoral, and in the degree that it becomes purposely one or the other will it cease to be a work of art. Why is Greuze so bad an artist? Because he set about being moral in an immoral spirit. Why is Hogarth so fine an artist though as moral as they make them? Because, like Corneille, he believed that vice and virtue had only to be painted *as they are* for virtue, in Corneille's austere words, "to win all hearts even in misery, and vice to be hated even though triumphant."

Irruption of the Two Pretty Twins: Fogey and Bogey

I want this clearly understood—that I have no axe to grind save the old axe, which is the belief that a sincere work of art is not a mere thing of pleasure but a discovery of truths in operation, such a discovery as should lead to a deepening of consciousness in the man who reads, sees, or hears the work, if only the work be sufficiently well made. For on one thing I am set: I will be what I am and say what I wish to say whether the result be popularity, derision, or indifference, though the fogey, Good Taste, and the bogey, a Sense of Humour, would say me nay. For I am profoundly of the opinion that there are those of us who have had enough, and a good deal more than enough, of that infernal pair. Those who have read the play, those who have read thus far in this preface cannot, I hope, have failed to observe that there is an almost notable absence of these Popular Favourites throughout the text. Well, well; as Goethe remarks, "Certain minds must be allowed their peculiarities," though, while you are remembering that dictum, I would remind you of another, which may be less pleasant to you, out of the same mouth: "Art rests upon a kind of religious sense; it is deeply and ineradicably in earnest." Earnestness does not, of course, eliminate humour. Far from it. But as far as the merry English are concerned they prefer the two separate. The only other modern

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English play dealing with personal redemption, as far as I am aware, beside *Guilty Souls* is *The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet*. That play was banished to Ireland, to be produced presumably before Catholics, who, as everybody knows, are a frivolous race given to blasphemy. Thus the English, God, and the peculiarities of the English Constitution (which appoints a Censor to preserve religion) saved their souls, and the Irish Catholics were afforded an opportunity of losing theirs by attending a play the theme of which, treated in an earnest if humorous way, was such personal redemption as is manifestly more necessary to an Irish Catholic than to an English Protestant.

Mr. Punch's Distinguished First Cousins in the Casualty List

Accordingly, as cannot fail to be observed, there is not in my play a single character with a sense of humour or good taste. And I am glad of it. The Prince of Darkness knows how many souls—more especially in England—are lost through Good Taste. That is precisely why he hastens to be known as a gentleman. As for humour, any humour I might have indulged in would either have prevented the play being shown at all or, being misinterpreted, would have assured my being taken to the bosom of that England which I hate: the England which has permitted humour to become its master instead of keeping humour as its servant. For the function of Humour, I take it, is this: from time to time to twitch the self-

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electd by the sleeve, shake its bells, hold up its mirror at an awkward angle, and ask his master how he likes the image. But in England to-day no man can walk upright for the tugging of a Bogey-Hercules at his either elbow who pushes or pulls the man who should command him into a herd of mirrors, originally, maybe, the property of Heartbreak House. (Indeed, I did always deem that plethora of mirrors in Heartbreak House highly symbolical.) And this Hercules-Bogey has a bad heart: he bids us deride not only ourselves but whatever differs from ourselves in possessing an energy or a crude nobility we do not understand. Did we observe him more closely we should discover that he has become own brother to Giant Sloth and Coward Envy and Miser Uncharitableness. Humour is a tonic medicine, restoring clouded and overweening fancies to clarity: the English of to-day have made of it a morphean and antic drug which permits them to drowse blind and deaf to the light and the voice within that cries "Up, play the man. I count none great but he that is generous of heart,"¹ or crooks them—O ultimate cruelty!—in gestures mimicking with the wickedest mirth of which mankind is capable the responses that light and that cry should elicit—to what end? Mockery. There lies your crime, O Genro, and there yours, O Young of To-day, who have permitted yourselves to think yourselves disillusioned: you have forgotten the

¹ "*Je ne reconnais pas d'autres signes de supériorité que la bonté.*"—Beethoven to Beltina Brentano, July 17, 1812.

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final essential to the making of a man—Reverence. Slay Humour ere Humour slays you. In the name of What do you submit to such tyranny? Is Reasonableness your God? If so, know then that Reasonableness and Wisdom are foes. Learn of one mocked his life through and now, if any man shall ever be immortal, immortal: William Blake. He said, "Listen to the fool's reproach; it is a kingly title!" "Expect poison from standing water," "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction," "When thou seest an eagle thou seest a portion of genius; lift up thy head," and "He whose face gives no light shall never become a star."

As for me, glancing back through these pages, I perceive that I have provided you with several little phrases of which Irony, the only gift you seem to have left, should very well know how to make use. There is, for instance, a phrase about Prometheus as "the symbol of my God," and a phrase (stolen, I would remark, from a book by Arnold Bennett on Literary Taste) concerning the "passionate few." I present you with these darts. You will find plenty more scattered among particular passages. Again, much in the general manner of this preface will, I see not without a grimmer humour than any you dream of, afford an admirable text for a return of quotidian homilies on the need of assistance from Hercules-Bogey's elderly associate, Good Taste. Well, well, in American phrase, "Go to it!" Yes, I have lapsed. I am fully and joyfully aware of it.

Some of you have lived so long in Heartbreak House, with your eye on the mirrors, that the only way to get you to realize the existence of the outside world is to push up the window and permit a bad smell to enter—and mingled with it, perchance, the smell of fresh fields and flowers and great winds so unlike the stifling odour of your sick-room orchids. For, as far as a man can ever escape his past, I have done with Heartbreak House for ever. I am off for a Ramble, and you shall find me, I think, tired but content, if not happy, when night comes down and “that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars” curtains me about. I have discovered what I care for, and what I care for cannot be found in Heartbreak House. Indeed, Heartbreak House could never contain it, for were it compelled to lie, in however crystal a casket, among the bric-à-brac of the drawing-room, undergoing that stealthy process of defilement which all things in that luckless house sooner or later undergo, how would it gather its forces together, how would it crouch to spring, how, finally, would it explode, blowing out all those pretty windows! But why wait? I hold it in my hand: that “soul of sweet delight” which, as Blake sings, “can never be defiled.” Farewell, then, to the human and un-human bric-à-brac! Already the mouse shrieks behind the decaying wainscot, already dilapidation begins though the cultivated voices of the guests prattle as freely as ever for all that now and again the graver among them cast a glance towards those

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hangings, storied by the needle's art
With obscure history or classic fable
Whose gist is faded save in one rent part
Where Cain is slaying Abel.

Accordingly, since the door appears locked or has become more than usually stuck through the latest application of the newest paint, let us break a hole in the window and hop out.

Is anybody coming with me? The Ramble will be long and arduous, and there will be as many quags as the bravest heart in a body having the stoutest legs could wish. But I had rather die in a ditch or a desert with a pint of honest air in my lungs or freeze on the lonely ledges of the heights, if so be Prometheus account me worthy and deign to lead me thither, than perish observing myself and others among the tarnished mirrors, the reek and shimmer of the candles, the cobwebs, and the coffin dust. "He who does not value life," says Leonardo, "deserves it not." Any stone, provided it be used with a will, serves for the window. And so here goes with my *Guilty Souls*.

The Writing of the Play

So much for the audience. So much for myself. Now to the text. I am perfectly aware that in many ways this play is a poor thing. But having regard for the circumstances under which it was written I find myself surprised that it is not a deal worse. In any event, since it is my first play, it is bound to contain many faults which, with further experience of the medium, I hope in later

work to avoid. It is a play written as the circumstances of my life permitted—that is to say, it was written without that command of leisure which is so misunderstood by the world and so rarely possible to the artist of the present age. At the close of the period during which it was composed I was compelled to write the last act—scenario and all—within eight days. And I had so hoped for a month of peace before I tackled it!—for two weeks of meditation, of that process of letting the subject sink out of sight into the deeps of the being, so that, when you haul it up, it comes up in such measure, richly enveloped in an atmosphere of associations, overwhelmingly, tinglingly attractive and apt to the hand that you have but to give it a shake and a twist during the following two weeks and, heigh presto! the little figure forthwith arranges itself in the correct posture, seems to gaze at you from within its tenement, and all you have henceforward to do is to coax it, press it, pull it, thumb it into growing down to the minutest articulation even as it should in accordance with the rules that govern its particular being. But no such luck! I had to wrench the thing up, construct a framework for the last act *with my mind*, not let the framework, as it should, construct itself in my spirit, and then hurl myself at it, fingers all thumbs, during the few remaining days. And the result was that another's clay found its way into my own. I didn't realize it at the time. And now I can't pick it out: there are quite half-a-dozen sentences from Paul

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Claudél's *L'Otage* in the last act. The situation between Bentley and Lois is somewhat the same as that obtaining between the Priest and Sygne in the Second Act of *L'Otage*. Of this similarity of situation I was aware. But of the fact that I had borrowed these sentences I was not, for the crisis, when it comes, is differently handled, and it was toward that that I was so desperately moving. I suppose the general feeling of Claudél's great scene—the greatest in the modern theatre—had me all unconscious in its grip. I make haste to acknowledge what I have not, owing to circumstances over which I have no control, been able to alter. The play was finished at last. I at once rejoiced and regretted: I had it done, but done only after a sort. I regretted I had finished with characters that had become more real to me than most living persons—so real that I often felt as if I talked with them and, going out to wander on Boar's Hill, half expected to meet Bentley slouching along slashing the hedge with his stick, or encounter the subdued and furious eyes of Bryant watching me from the shadow of a door. And I was angry, for I knew that it was unlikely that I should ever be able to alter and reshape the play under the circumstances and surroundings of the life to which I was going. For that it must be reshaped and remodelled from end to end I perceived after reading it to certain patient friends, among them Mr. Granville-Barker. The thing, in the first place, was much too long. The first two acts had to be telescoped. I didn't know how

to do it. And to-day I don't know how to do it. Mr. Granville-Barker suggested cutting—with a hatchet. Hope revived. Mere cutting on a ruthless scale, then, would do—at any rate, for the time being. When the cut copy arrived I would see the sorts of mistakes I had made and could remodel the whole affair. But at the same time my heart—despite the extreme kindness to me and interest in the play displayed by Mr. Granville-Barker and Mr. Bennett and Mr. Masfield—very definitely sank. I felt that in Japan I should never be able to begin again in the old spirit. And so it has fallen out. I can't sufficiently get back into the mood to recreate the whole affair. Our works are often but prophecies of ourselves, which forthwith become our past, and which we leave to posterity to treat as it will. When I began I had the "revelation" behind me, but I was still developing on those lines. Toward the close of the year during which I worked at the play that phase ended. One cannot go back. I am beyond it now—as far as one is ever beyond the personal past. I have, therefore, adopted nearly all Mr. Granville-Barker's cuts, made a few adjustments and titivations, and with a somewhat heavy heart—the thing has been in its time very much my pet particular darling—now launch it on the world.

I have one consolation—its faults are not the faults of meanness: I don't think there's a single problem in the theme which I have shirked. Whatever came up I tackled. The chief faults

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I see in it are these: it is too long, it is verbose, it is particularly faulty in construction during Act III. Such as perceive these faults with an impatience that tempts them to think no more about the play I ask to contemplate the problem presented. My idea of a play is that certain persons in certain circumstances are to be set before the audience, that accident be barred, and that those persons work out their destinies before the audience in accordance with what was originally postulated of the persons. In this play the reader will observe I commenced with two solicitors and a deed box, and I end with two guilty souls and God. Only those who have never tried their hand at it suppose that such a transition is easy. If I were writing a detective play for the commercial theatre I should stick to the deed box. But I am more ambitious than to wish to stir you only with the physical thrills of the crook's attempted escape from a policeman: I wish to stir you with the thrill of a crooked soul's attempted escape from God. In other words, I aim at deepening your consciousness to a greater degree than obtains in the spectacle of a detective drama, and therefore at being incomparably a greater artist than the author of such a detective drama. For the measure of any work of art whatsoever is the measure in which it deepens the consciousness. There is no other measure—that is why a Pièta of Michelangelo is greater than the figurine of a Dresden shepherdess. For there is measure between works of art—whatever protagonists of the Art for

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Art's sake may assert to the contrary. And this is precisely why I am thankful, whatever be the result, that I attempted this theme—for it is not a mean or a merely frivolous theme. It isn't written to help an Englishman or American digest his dinner or to produce sensual titillations in the breasts of young men or sentimental effervescence in those of young women. Nor is it written further to compose the minds of the flaccid or soothe the self-esteem of the self-indulgent. In short, I thank heaven, such as the play is it has come from my hands to this extent as I wished it to come—intense, violent, uncompromising, and with, I hope, a cutting edge to it. I hope that as such, when and if it is acted, it will be acted like the very devil. Certainly I shall have written in vain if it isn't. I want to prick every single person who sees it, to the heart. I shan't succeed, of course, but that is the idea. For my idea of a fine drama or tragedy is a drama or tragedy from which each member of the audience departs in silence, in fear, and in joy, having come into touch with that sort of holiest terror and holiest joy that I feel in life almost every day that I live. I want every member of the audience to leave the theatre feeling that the stakes in life are enormous, and that a man should play the game heroically. For that is the function of the artist—to take the Man-under-the-Bowler and shake him into startled, trembling and delighted appreciation of the fact that merely to be John Blennerhasset Brown, bowler on head, a phenomenon in this universe,

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conscious to some extent of this universe and capable of becoming more conscious, is, to put it mildly, a terrifically exciting and awe-inspiring existence.

Farewell to the Genro

As for you, Genro—whom I have so much abused—reading this book, forgive me, forgive us, if I, if we, have hurt you. But how are you to understand unless there is brought home to you some of the joy and the bitterness in our hearts? It is not you we dislike, but the apathy and cynicism you have allowed yourself to drift into. I know very well what the Sage has said, that “every man over fifty is in some sort a Lear,” and *Lear* is my favourite play. But you must see us as we are. Our faults are palpable. Nobody could miss them. Are you so sure that you have taken an equal trouble to explore our few virtues as you have to record our over-notorious vices? We wish to be generous. There should be no place for bitterness in the effort to construct a New England, a New Europe. We have had enough of bitterness, enough of hate. With your sarcasm you wither not us, but our faith. That is a distinction that does not seem to have occurred to you. You say we pay no proper attention to you. No more does the boy who is whipped. The way to get great things of a youth is to expect great things of youth along those lines, of that substance which distinguishes that particular youth. You complain of our selfishness, but you make fun of our causes,

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of those movements, imbecile perhaps as some of them are, which are nevertheless the first response of the Young Intelligencia to questions and needs which change of circumstances has placed before and charged to the world. You didn't forgive or understand us in the past: by what we were, by what you thought of us in the war—you had plenty to say for us then!—try to forgive and understand us now.

Of this play, of this preface, you are welcome to make as much fun as you know how. I have more than one shot left in my locker. But if you make fun of the sort of spirit which prompts such efforts, whatever their final value, then you are blaspheming and are absolutely and for ever damned. As for me, whether you mock me or no, I care not. It is not the wolves or hyenas I fear, but the frost and loneliness of the desert. What matter if this fail? It isn't what one makes of life that counts so much as the spirit brought to the making. Let me break so be I do not bend! No life is very long, and, if I bend not, that life cannot be all unhappy. Indeed, in writing this play and preface even now I have found a sort of desperate happiness. "He who fixes his course by a star," says Leonardo, "changes not"; and Keats, "The world is not a vale of tears, but a vale of soul-making!" I shall have lived by that which saves.

R. M. B. N.

Tokio, 1921.

To

ARNOLD BENNETT

but for whose enthusiasm as
an artist, for whose patience,
kindness, and gentle wisdom
as a friend, this, the first
drama I have ever undertaken,
would never have been finished.

DRAMAS FOR THE THEATRE OF TO-MORROW
NUMBER ONE: GUILTY SOULS

*Ubi mihi bene fuit sine te? Aut quando male esse
potuit praesente te?*

De Imitatione Christi : THOMAS À KEMPIS

*If I were pure, never could I taste the sweetness
of forgiveness of sins;
If I were holy, I never could behold the tears of
love
Of Him who loves me in the midst of his anger.*

Jerusalem: WILLIAM BLAKE

GUILTY SOULS

PERSONS IN THE DRAMA

(in the order of first appearance)

OSWALD BENTLEY: *solicitor, senior partner in Bentley and Vyson*

JOSEPH PARK: *his confidential clerk*

PAUL VYSON: *junior partner in Bentley and Vyson*

CLARA BENTLEY: *Oswald Bentley's wife*

SIR HECTOR ADDERLY

RUPERT ADDERLY: *Sir Hector's son*

MR. WENTWORTH: *manager of a branch of Smithson's Bank*

LOIS FORSTER

A POLICEMAN

DOCTOR HASTINGS

TWO PLAIN-CLOTHESMEN

PERIOD: *the present*

PLACE: *in the East Midlands of England*

ACT I. SCENE I: *Bentley's room in the office of Bentley and Vyson*

SCENE II: *the same, a week later*

ACT II: *the dining-room of Bentley's house some seven years later*

ACT III: *the same, three days later*

ACT IV: *the same, the following morning*

GUILTY SOULS

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The office of OSWALD BENTLEY, senior partner of Bentley and Vyson, solicitors, a firm in an East Midland Cathedral city. In the back two windows with green blinds. Between these windows a tall bookcase, in the bottom of which is a cupboard. Above are shelves filled with law books. On an empty shelf a box calendar of the roller pattern in a conspicuous position. In the right wall downstage a door with frosted glass panel. In the left wall upstage a deal door. To the left of the room, well forward but with space to move between the table and the proscenium, a table covered with green baize cloth and furnished with a writing pad, having three chairs set to it—one chair on each side save the side of the proscenium. Under the table lies an opened copy of "The Times." To the right, not so far forward, a heavy roller-top desk with swivel chair drawn up to it and a telephone on its top. Between the desk and the table a chair for clients. In the swivel chair sits BENTLEY, a burly, vigorous man of thirty-seven, clean shaven, with a fine forehead and a slightly careworn expression on his quiet but dogged face. When moved, his features, apparently so reserved, become extremely animated in an uneven, brusque

sort of way, and his voice, usually grave and monotonous, takes on a deep, varied, and musical character which has about it at the same time something a little naïve. It is ten o'clock on a yellow foggy Tuesday morning in November. The sound of a violin begins somewhere outside the door to right. BENTLEY considers the sound. Presently he touches a bell on the top of his desk. JOSEPH PARK, known as "Joe," his confidential clerk, enters from the left. JOE is nearer sixty than fifty—a thin, insipid, blue-eyed, garrulous, trustworthy old nuisance not altogether free from malice. His manner varies from the timid but obstinate to the very "proper," mildly dictatorial. He knows his place and expects other people to know theirs. But towards BENTLEY he exercises a tone of highly-respectful familiarity.

BENTLEY. Good morning, Joe.

JOE. Good morning, Mister Oswald.

BENTLEY. Not a very grand morning.

JOE. No, sir. Rain overnight, I notice.

BENTLEY. Ground's very soft. Daresay Sir Hector Adderly wished it as soft as this on Saturday. My wife says she hears he took a nasty toss. Heard anything of it?

JOE. Sir Hector's chief groom mentioned it o' Sunday when I was coming out o' church.

BENTLEY. The *new* groom?

JOE. Yes, sir. [*Chuckling.*] He doesn't know what Sir Hector is yet, sir.

BENTLEY [*dryly reproving*]. Perhaps not. Any particulars?

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JOE. Sir Hector's in bed but not much hurt, though he was going at it—a gate it was—mighty hard, same as he does everything.

BENTLEY. Oh, well, that's that. Glad he's not hurt. Can't afford to lose a client. [*He laughs shortly.*]

JOE. No, indeed, sir.

BENTLEY [*handing papers*]. Here: not many.

JOE. Never are o' Tuesdays, sir, and it's the slack season.

BENTLEY. Um. Don't remember this as the slack season when I entered the firm.

JOE. You was too busy learning, sir. I remember you sitting by me. Very quick you was too, sir, if I may say so.

BENTLEY [*impulsively*]. Yes, I owe lots to you. Old Mr. Vyson said when he took me into the firm: "You'll learn more from Joseph Park than from any examinations." Here's another.

JOE [*taking papers*]. Did he indeed, sir? That was like him: a very kind old gentleman, a good, steady master and a rare head for business [*glancing at door*] until he got broken up by his son running off with that Italian woman. He couldn't stand Popish peoples. Between ourselves, sir, he never recovered, and, if it hadn't been for his taking you on, the firm wouldn't ha' recovered, either. You plucked his spirits up again.

BENTLEY. Hard work and plenty of it. [*Pause.*] But . . . I will be plain with you, Joe. Sit down. As confidential clerk you probably guess it already—our business has been falling off.

[*Staring gloomily.*] The firm's not what it was.

JOE [*quickly*]. And hasn't been these six months.

BENTLEY [*glancing sideways*]. Six months?

JOE [*timidly*]. Well, I—may I be plain, sir? Since young Mr. Vyson—but p'raps I'd better not—it's only my idea.

BENTLEY [*almost sharply*]. I will not have any beating about the bush. Come, now, what is this idea of yours? I heard you mention young Mr. Vyson.

JOE [*with resolution*]. People don't like him, sir. He isn't like other people. Not to me, sir. I never takes any notice of him. I knew his father.

BENTLEY. I didn't. Do people bring up his father against him?

JOE. In a kind of way they do, sir. They remember what sort o' company he kept, sir: disgraceful it was, really, sir. An' then he was a blasphemer—a Bradlaugh man, sir, and all that. And he ended by running off with a Roman Catholic. An odd man, sir, and a bad man; he left a lot o' bills unpaid.

BENTLEY. Old Mr. Vyson settled them.

JOE. I know he did, sir: a nice tot up they were: an 'orse and gig, wines and spirits from the Crown Hotel, women's dress, and what was strange church appointments, so I've heard say, incense burners, crucifixes, and what not, that aren't good to mention. All that is against his son. And the more particularly so since one of our townsmen, come back from Australia, will have it he deserted

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his wife out there and took the boy with him. It killed his mother: and [*gesturing to door*] the boy running about with a man like him.

BENTLEY. All this is news to me. Old Mr. Vyson, just before he died, told me he had cast his son off for good. Never told me anything of his escapades. He simply wished to help the grandson there to his articles and make him a junior partner on the condition that he stayed twelve years from the day he entered the office. No money on any other condition. Hoped to steady him, I suppose. The pity was that no sooner was the grandson in the office than the old gentleman died. It seems hard that they should rake up his father against young Mr. Vyson.

JOE. Well, sir, it isn't altogether that.

BENTLEY. What is it then?

JOE. He's that odd.

BENTLEY. H'm, he has his own amusements, of course—music, French literature, criminology. I believe he writes verses.

JOE. That's it, sir: he's not like other men, sir. He doesn't play tennis or golf like a good gentleman should, sir. And he don't go to church, either. Moons about. His manner, especially with clients, ain't just, sir—sort as if he was laughing in his sleeve. Ruining the business, that's what he's doing, sir.

BENTLEY [*with sudden savagery*]. Ruining? [*Self-composed again.*] Tch! nonsense.

JOE. People don't trust him, sir. How can

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they, sir, when they steps in and hears—[*the violin has begun again*]*—at a quarter to eleven of a Tuesday morning?*

BENTLEY [*musings*]. Yes . . . just so. [*Pause and change of tone.*] Thank you, Joe. That will do. [*The violin ceases.*]

JOE. I only told you, sir, for your sake, sir. And the firm, sir.

BENTLEY. Quite so. Quite so. I understand, thank you.

[*JOE retires to his den. BENTLEY falls into a brief reverie, then resumes his work. Presently the door behind him clicks. A face peers round the jamb—a spare, strange face of fresh complexion with turned down moustaches under a thin nose, a little imperial beneath ironic lips and a glance, now ineffectual and forlorn . . . anon of a dark and intense penetration, from restless, melancholy eyes. BENTLEY, who started a little when the door opened, goes on working. After a pause the door moves softly to half the extent of its swing, and the owner of the strange face, PAUL VYSON, aged about twenty-five, stands with his hand upon the jamb, tip-toe, half in, half out of the room.*]

BENTLEY [*without looking up*]. Come in if you want to, Paul. [*VYSON comes in. With decision.*] Good morning.

VYSON [*not without an occasional curious elabo-*

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rateness of elocution, and always playing with his own hands as he talks—sometimes admiring them, sometimes holding them up to the light, sometimes hiding one of them in the breast of his coat]. Good morning. I wish one didn't always have to say "Good morning": idiotic word, it only embarrasses one.

BENTLEY [*affectionately*]. Too self-conscious.

VYSON [*with a tiny flash*]. No, too conscious of others.

BENTLEY. Um. I'm rather busy.

VYSON. Busy? [*He titters.*] Building up that honest but capable, that sound but enterprising, that scrupulous but shrewd solicitor's business which in the end will land you—where? Where, indeed? You have already scaled the heights. Are you not a Justice of the Peace and a churchwarden at St. Thomas—is it? Strange for a man like you.

BENTLEY [*amused and affectionate*]. Never mind. There's room for Paul Vyson. Work a bit harder and you, too, will be churchwarden at St. Thomas.

VYSON. St. Thomas, the unbeliever!

BENTLEY. Exactly.

VYSON. Your religion's convention.

BENTLEY. Your freethought's prejudice.

[VYSON *takes out a cigarette, taps it elaborately on the back of his hand, produces a silver match-box. JOE enters. VYSON, flourishing, lights the cigarette and proceeds to play knuckle-bones, right arm*

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at full stretch, with the match-box on the back of his hand. JOE looks at VYSON with distaste. As JOE passes, VYSON, all but missing a throw, exclaims sharply, "Mind."

JOE [*with bitter politeness*]. Beg pardon, sir. [*To BENTLEY.*] For you to sign, sir.

BENTLEY. Let me see. [*He goes through the papers.*] All correct. [*He signs.*] There's one more which I'd like now—Mr. Buck's. Get it, please. [JOE goes.]

VYSON. Look at that. Safety always. How that conscience does work! You knew perfectly well all those papers were in order. It makes me shudder. That is the old unlikeable display of your conscience. The other display I like: that which gives you at times a sort of mental *malaise* and makes you cross-examine yourself as to whether you haven't spent a quarter of an hour lounging instead of working for your wife.

BENTLEY [*gently, but seriously*]. Leave my wife out of it, Paul.

VYSON [*genuine*]. Sorry. I know what she is to you. That's another of the things I like about you—your adoration of her, though she's not worth a third of you. Sorry—said the wrong thing again. [*He laughs apologetically.*]

BENTLEY [*heartily*]. You hardly know her.

VYSON [*with an embarrassed air, comes forward and leans on the top of the desk as if he were going to say something. Then he retires again. Looking at the top of his cigarette*]. I say——.

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BENTLEY [*a little weary*]. Well . . . ?
[*Smiling.*] Out with it.

VYSON. It's nothing. [BENTLEY *grunts ironically and bends to his work. Abruptly.*] Look here, I want some money.

BENTLEY. Aha! good. We've been wasting precious time.

VYSON. Precious!

BENTLEY [*disregarding the exclamation*]. Hm. How much do you want? Twenty pounds?

VYSON. Twenty pounds! Not I. Well, I—the fact is, I've run into a bit of a debt.

BENTLEY. But you live like a student.

VYSON. Don't students always have debts? [BENTLEY *laughs.*] I dropped across to the Bank opposite and asked for a loan. The manager wanted security: I offered him my copper shares, thinking to raise a hundred and forty pounds on them easy. [*With real spite.*] He offered me forty pounds. [JOE *has entered, unperceived by VYSON.*] I wish my confounded grandad——

BENTLEY [*nettled at last*]. Now—ah, Joe, Mr. Buck's paper. [*Pretending to look at paper while he swallows his wrath.*] Thanks. Yes. [*He signs and returns the paper to JOE, who retires again.*]

VYSON [*leaning on edge of table, weakly*]. Well, what am I to do? [BENTLEY *looks at him without a word.*] I must have it. Bentley, aren't you ever hard up? [*Brilliant smile.*] Come, say you are and I'll believe in humanity again.

BENTLEY [*yielding*]. Yes, I am hard up—I'm

a trifle hard up now, if you want to know. And I hate grub, grub, grub as much as you do. I'd like to do something brilliant. What's more, I could.

VYSON [*cutting in*]. If you had the heart.

BENTLEY [*rising and going over to him, suddenly very grim*]. If I had the heart! Man, when will you learn that I've got the heart of fifty chickens like you! [*Abrupt change of tone.*] Sorry. Bit worked up this morning, Vyson. Joe tries to hide it, but business is not increasing.

VYSON [*softly*]. That's very distressing. Virtue is its own reward—as usual. [*Slight pause, louder.*] Well, what good does this heart of yours worth fifty chickens like me do you?

BENTLEY. R-I-S-K spells "Risk." There's my wife to consider.

VYSON [*watching BENTLEY out of the corner of his eye, reasonably*]. Are you considering her? I remember your telling me you were not her social equal at the time you married her. Look at the tedium she must feel in this beastly jog-trot provincial town—after London. Think of her cultivation, her intellect, her integrity of mind. Why, music alone! What chance has she here with the Philistine, the slow-witted, the conventional?

BENTLEY [*a little abashed*]. I'm so self-centred. I never——

VYSON [*following up his advantage*]. What does a woman not conceal . . . for the man she loves? [*As if absently.*] Think of her daring,

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her spirit . . . with you she'd face [*hesitating*]
a risk. [*Their eyes meet.*]

BENTLEY. An *honest* risk?

VYSON. An honest risk! Of course. You surely don't suppose I—

BENTLEY [*absently*]. No, of course . . . your eyes . . .

VYSON [*breaking out*]. But to be in debt! Wanted, a hundred and forty pounds! Bah!

BENTLEY. You shall have your hundred and forty.

VYSON [*who had turned away, spins round*]. What?

BENTLEY. You're right. This isn't good enough. Sit down. [VYSON *seats himself on the edge of the table.*] We've got to make a change. Now, listen. Your grandfather was a very astute old gentleman. He had spent his life on the firm, and he wished that after his death it should continue to enjoy the same reputation as it had during his life. To that end he took the most elaborate precautions, precautions to a great extent dictated by the evil memory of his son, your father, which haunted him as the absolute symbol of all that's untrustworthy. First, as you know, he let it be supposed that he had left the business entirely to me, while imposing a secret condition that I should take you on if satisfactory. He knew—excuse my referring to it—that your father's record would be against you, and, to tell the whole truth, I'm inclined to think your own character puzzled him not a little. He did two other things, neither of

which I have disclosed to you. He advised me to sign no actual deed of partnership with you till we had worked together in verbal partnership for three years. It's absurd, but out of respect for him I have kept it. Finally, he confided to my care what he called his "little nest egg," a box of miscellaneous investments.

VYSON. Ha! ha! The plot thickens; an excellent ancient. Go on.

BENTLEY. This box, he explained, was for use on what he called "a rainy day," and, being in doubt as to the stability of your character, he impressed on me that I was not to tell you of its existence till need should arise.

VYSON. I shall have my hundred and forty?

BENTLEY [*shortly*]. Yes, of course. But your difficulties are not the only difficulties we are considering. Business is declining. The firm must strike out. You've heard me speak of Braithwaite's plunge in rubber? Very well, I've alternative schemes worked out; and, if not rubber, then oil.

VYSON. Damned risky.

BENTLEY. Who's got a heart? I've studied those markets for two years now.

VYSON. So that's what you do with your evenings at home, eh? Enterprise, hurrah! [*Anxiously.*] You'll pay off my debts before we begin?

BENTLEY. Yes, yes. Well, according to the present state of the market the sooner the better. Will you step across to the bank and get the firm's deed-box?

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VYSON. My hat's across the passage.

[VYSON goes out to right.]

BENTLEY [*pulling at the papers on his desk*]. Where's that note I made about Adderly? [VYSON re-enters, hat in hand.] Oh, Paul, you might bring Adderly's box as well while you're about it. I want to check the securities by this list. Time one or two mortgages were called in. [*Change of tone.*] Well, it's agreed? You trust me?

VYSON. I shall get my hundred and forty?

BENTLEY. Of course—before we begin. But the new scheme?

VYSON [*heartily*]. Oh, go ahead, my dear chap, go ahead. I trust you absolutely. It won't affect me.

BENTLEY. But it's the firm's money.

VYSON [*with a gleam of mischief*]. Just so.

[*He shakes hands energetically and goes out to right.*]

BENTLEY. Well, I'm—— [*He shrugs. Then he begins a determined march up and down the room, thumbs in waistcoat upper pockets, fingers tapping his chest, head poked forward. He mutters.*] I shall need four thousand at least. Have we got it?

[*The door to the right suddenly opens and MRS. BENTLEY enters—a self-possessed, slim, rather rigid, fair-haired Athene of twenty-eight. She holds an open telegram in her hand.*]

[*Directly the door opened BENTLEY had*

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swung round. His voice as he cries "Clara!" is not encouraging.

CLARA [*whose voice is singularly hard, clear and bright*]. No other. [*She approaches him and says with an air of Puritan demureness as she looks into his eyes.*] I know that in my wifely duty I shouldn't disturb you—but——

BENTLEY. I'm very busy this morning, I——

CLARA [*with just a hint of irony*]. Yes, I see you are.

BENTLEY. Is it important?

CLARA. Yes, you've got to decide something.

BENTLEY [*bluntly*]. Are you sure *you* haven't decided something?

[*She holds up the telegram with a determined air of spritely mockery.*

BENTLEY [*still preoccupied.*] Who's it from?

CLARA. Your sister. [*Reading.*] "Can Lois come and stay with you in week's time pending possible arrangement mentioned in last letter?"

BENTLEY [*rousing*]. Lois! Let me see; which daughter is Lois?

CLARA. Funny how you always get mixed up over the relations in your own clan. [*Slowly.*] Listen: Lois is the daughter of your sister's late husband by his first wife. The other four that the poor dear has on her hands are her own children.

BENTLEY [*musings*]. Lois is the dark one.

CLARA. The intelligent one.

BENTLEY. The fact is, she wants to get rid of Lois——

CLARA. Well, yes. Agatha, her eldest

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daughter's nearly grown up and can help her with the three little ones. I fancy Lois, not being her own daughter, has always been a little strange to your sister. She wrote to me a week ago. But I didn't realize it was pressing, and so didn't worry you.

BENTLEY. Of course she can stay. That's if you wish her.

CLARA. It may be for good. But she'll be sixteen—old enough for me to talk to——

BENTLEY. To talk to! I don't follow you: I mean, it's going to be an expensive luxury—a nearly grown-up girl to keep!

CLARA. Do you grudge it?

BENTLEY [*lamely*]. Well, I——

CLARA. Oswald, what sort of a life do you think it is I lead? You have your work—but what have I, transplanted from London to this wretched cathedral city?

BENTLEY [*the universe beginning to reel*]. But I—I—I thought you were happy!

CLARA. The happy always think other people are happy.

BENTLEY. The happy! Um.

CLARA [*disregarding, sunk in her own appeal*]. But I'm lonely. The house is very empty when you're not there. And nothing ever happens. I get clogged up. I begin to die. I was used to sunlight and the exchange of thoughts. Nobody has thoughts here, and they live like mice in dark rooms.

[BENTLEY *walks up and down*.

BENTLEY [*stopping*]. Will Lois help you?

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CLARA. Yes. She is the first step.

BENTLEY. The first step?

CLARA. Oh, yes, the first step. Forgive me, Oswald, but I can hide it no longer. I can't go on like this. I feel I shall die. I'm being buried alive.

BENTLEY [*very slowly*]. I see. [*Pause.*] Well?

[*He gives her a long look almost of reproach. She smiles lovingly.*]

CLARA [*coming up to him and laying her hands on his shoulders*]. Well? [*Mesmerizing him with her eyes and then withdrawing lightly.*] Lois may come?

BENTLEY [*subdued*]. Buried alive! [*With sudden violence.*] Yes, wire she can come to-day if she likes. [*Sharply.*] Now let me get on with my work.

CLARA. Tch! You are rude.

BENTLEY. I've got work. [*CLARA makes a face. Having gained her point she is all gaiety, teasing, and love.*] You don't seem to realize that that work's for you.

CLARA. And what a dull room to work in! I'm sorry for you. [*She kisses the top of his head.*] There! [*He shrugs.*]

CLARA [*standing up*]. Patience! [*Bending.*] Thank you for letting Lois come. [*She kisses him.*] Good-bye. [*At the door she turns to look back. BENTLEY has evidently at once forgotten her existence. Before he knows what she is up to, she has come back and flung her arms round his*]

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neck and kissed him.] Tch! don't swear. Ow! You're deliciously strong. [With a sudden cry.] Don't! You're hurting. [She stands back.] How could you! You've bruised my arm.

BENTLEY [*a good deal ruffled*]. Nonsense.

CLARA. You have.

BENTLEY. Well, look at my table. [*He points to the disorder consequent on the embrace.*]

CLARA [*passionately*]. Damn your business: it makes me jealous. You forget me directly my back is turned.

BENTLEY [*almost bitterly*]. Do I! Do I!

CLARA [*recovering*]. Well, no: but you did hurt me. You are strong, you know.

BENTLEY [*repentant*]. I'm sorry, my dear. Business is very engrossing. It *has* to be.

CLARA. More so than love? Now, just to prove it isn't, and to show you're sorry for these bruises you've given me you can come out and buy me—what shall you buy me?—a box of chocolates, yes, a box of chocolates for us both at the shop next door. It'll do you no harm to leave this for a minute. You look worried. It'll clear your mind.

BENTLEY [*half grumpy, half laughing*]. Clara, you really are!

CLARA. Now, don't say anything blunt! [*She goes toward door*]. Besides, I like to be seen in the town with you.

BENTLEY. Incurrrible!

CLARA. Incurrrible?

BENTLEY. Incurrrible lover! I'm nothing

but your beloved chattel. [*Touching bell.*] Half a moment. [*JOE appears.*] Joe, just tell Mr. Vyson, if he comes in, that I'll be back in a minute.

[*Mr. and Mrs. BENTLEY go out. JOE picks "The Times" from the floor and puts it on the table; then, exclaiming "Hello! hello! Now how did I forget that?" goes toward the calendar and turns it from Mon. 23rd to Tues. 24th. Then he returns to his den. VYSON, with his hat on, enters abruptly, carrying two boxes, marked respectively: "Sir H. Adderly" and "L. Vyson." These he places on the table. VYSON goes over to BENTLEY's desk, looks in the top right-hand drawer, and pulls out a bunch of keys. He selects two. Then he picks up the list. As he walks back scanning it JOE enters. VYSON abruptly turns the list over. It slips off the table.*

JOE. Oh, the master—Mr. Oswald I mean, sir—has just run out a moment with Mrs. Bentley—he told me to tell you. [*VYSON is stooping.*] Allow me, sir. [*He bends.*

VYSON. I can. [*JOE secures the list.*] I'll just hang up my hat. [*VYSON goes out to right. JOE scans the list with lips pursed reprovingly. Then he looks at the names on the boxes, and seeing the name "Adderly" his face becomes grim as he glances at the door. VYSON re-enters.*] That will do, Joe, you may go.

[*JOE goes, not without a backward gaze or*

ACT ONE

two at VYSON, who stands juggling with the keys. No sooner is JOE gone than VYSON unlocks both boxes, and is about to plunge his hand into Sir Hector's when BENTLEY returns.

BENTLEY. Back so soon! So you've opened them?

VYSON. Yes. All ready—ours and that scoundrel Adderly's. [*He lifts the boxes.*] You feel the weight of it. There's something for an old canting, bullying swine of a foxhunter for you. He's a cad if you like.

BENTLEY [*preoccupied, overcast*]. Yes, he's an ill-tempered sort of man.

VYSON [*walking up and down*]. Mean, too. And look at all that money! Never spends a penny on decent civilized things. Nothing but torturing, maiming, and killing animals—what he calls old-fashioned English sport. Doesn't even look after his property. Lets it drift except for grudging a penny where it would be useful. Hard on his tenants, too—and what for? Foxhounds! and half the country loathing him so much they wouldn't ride a mile to a meet of his. Bah! [*Meanwhile BENTLEY is running his eye over the contents of the box. His face, as he sits at the table, expresses profound discouragement.*] And to think of all this money [*stirring papers and talking on*] just lying idle! Enterprise! Good heavens! If I had that little lot, or a tithe of it, I'd make things hum, I'd make it work for me and mine. See here—[*he takes up the documents in*

a bunch and makes, over BENTLEY's shoulder as if to put them into the other box]. That'd look better, eh? [The eyes of the two men meet. VYSON drops the documents over BENTLEY's hands, turns away, walks a step or two and says.] Well, how do our precious millions stand?

BENTLEY [*automatically restoring dropped documents to Sir Hector's box*]. Er —um. Haven't finished looking through 'em——

VYSON. I'll get my hundred and forty?

BENTLEY. You may and you mayn't. It doesn't look absolutely rosy.

[He blows through his teeth.

VYSON [*springing round*]. What? O hell! What's the good of this foolery? [*Suddenly striding up to BENTLEY, leaning over him, and speaking through set teeth.*] By God, if I had a wife, if I had a heart, I'd do something, I would! [*He goes out slamming the door. BENTLEY, towering with rage, goes up to the closed door with clenched fists lifted.*]

BENTLEY [*sotto voce*]. You would? [*He returns to the table and fingers the papers, half incoherent exclamations escape him.*] "Would you, indeed?" "If I had a wife!" "Buried alive!" [*A sudden look of resolution comes into his face.*] "Very well!" *he says, and becomes quite calm. He runs a finger down Sir Hector's list. Then he looks stealthily round, takes the Adderly box and places it in the cupboard under the bookshelves between the windows. Then he rings his bell. Returning to the table, he pretends to be running*

ACT ONE

through the firm's box. JOE enters.] Anyone been in?

JOE. Yes, sir—Mr. Vyson. I gave him your message.

BENTLEY. Ah, Mr. Vyson, with this [*pointing to the firm's box*]? Anyone else?

JOE. No, sir.

BENTLEY. You may go. [*But JOE hesitates.*] Well, what is it?

JOE. If I might, sir: did you ask for Sir Hector's box? I wouldn't mention it, sir, but it was that strange. [*He looks at the table and sees the box marked Adderly is gone.*]

BENTLEY [*easily*]. Sir Hector's box? I don't think so, but we are due to run through the securities soon, aren't we? I daresay Mr. Vyson has it.

JOE. Mr. Vyson has indeed, sir; I saw him . . . his face . . .

BENTLEY. Joe, don't fuss. You seem to have got Mr. Vyson on the brain.

JOE. I was going to——

BENTLEY. Not now, Joe, not now.

[*He bends over the firm's box.*]

JOE [*departs, muttering in a purposely audible tone*]. You'll regret not listening to me, sir. You'll be swindled.

BENTLEY. Am I supposed to hear that last remark? Be careful!

[*JOE retreats precipitately. Scarcely has the door closed when BENTLEY, exclaiming softly "Swindled—I?" gently bolts JOE's door. Then, going to the cup-*

board, he brings Sir Hector's box to the table, selects two documents and, with a swift motion, transfers them to the bottom of the firm's box—not before he has, however, paused a moment in silent, smiling vindictiveness to shake the documents toward the door by which his partner had left, and from beyond which now float the strains of a mournful violin. For a moment he contemplates his handiwork, then quietly places the list in Sir Hector's box, closes it and locks it. Next he looks at the City column of "The Times," which JOE had picked up, and traces a few figures on a sheet of paper. He goes toward the door to the right, assuming an air of ease and vivacity. He steps out and calls "Paul! Paul!" The violin stops. BENTLEY re-enters the room. VYSON follows him in.

VYSON [*surlily*]. Well?

BENTLEY [*not looking at him*]. I've worked it out. [*He picks up the sheets of paper.*] We can just do it: your debts and my scheme. [*He lifts two documents from the bottom of the firm's box.*] You see these Bearer securities? Take them across to the bank and tell Wentworth to sell them through the bank's broker at once. Say it's for a client. We don't want the bank to know too much. Speculation isn't considered the business of a solicitor in a cathedral town. [*He laughs.*]

ACT ONE

They'll fetch about £4200, which satisfactory sum we must have in two days. You'll take your £140—the rest will be for the scheme.

VYSON [*admiringly*]. That's it. That's the sort of way to set about things.

BENTLEY. And you can take these boxes back at the same time. [*He locks them and puts the key back in his drawer.*]

VYSON. Certainly. [*With effusion.*] I say, this is grand!

BENTLEY [*indulgently, laughing*]. Test of the "heart worth fifty chickens," you know.

VYSON. Hurrah! Au revoir.

BENTLEY. Don't forget your hat in your joy. [*No sooner has VYSON safely closed the door than BENTLEY glides over and unbolts JOE's door. Then he resumes his seat and rings. JOE appears.*] Joe, draw that blind down. You know the trick of it. The sun's come out, it's in my eyes. I feel dazed. [*As JOE goes to the window VYSON passes with both boxes.*]

JOE [*to BENTLEY, who, after watching JOE give a start, is standing at his desk tapping the palm of his hand with a paper-knife.*] There. Mr. Vyson's going with both boxes. Sir, sir, I— [*at this moment the telephone on the desk top rings. The paper-knife has ceased to tap.*]

BENTLEY [*in a tense reverie*]. See who it is.

JOE [*at the telephone*]. Hello . . . hello. Who? . . . Barrett? Sir Hector Aduerly's agent wishes to speak to you . . .

BENTLEY [*holding the paper-knife suddenly*

GUILTY SOULS

stiff in the air, says steadily]. See . . . what . . . he . . . wants.

JOE. Eh . . . ? eh . . . ? a week to-day . . . yes . . . what? [*In a sudden panic*] *What box?* . . . Oh, there—he's rung off! [*Standing upright.*] Sir Hector wishes you to know he'll be in here to-day week, and will you have his security box brought over from the bank for him? [BENTLEY *nearly drops the paper-knife.*] But, sir, sir——

BENTLEY. A week to-day, did you say? [*Pulling himself together, waving JOE away.*] Very well. [*As JOE closes door to the left.*] Why not?

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE II

The same office at 9-30 o'clock on a bright frosty morning a week later. JOE is standing adjusting the calendar. When he has turned it to Tuesday, November 31st, he puts it back on the shelf and shakes his head at it. At this moment the door opens and BENTLEY, brushing a dust of frost from his sleeve, enters. There is frost and gravel on his back.

BENTLEY. Good morning, Joe.

JOE. Morning, sir.

BENTLEY. Give me a brush, please.

JOE. Not an accident, I hope, sir. [*Takes the brush from the shelf.*]

BENTLEY [*briefly, as JOE brushes*]. A neighbour drove myself and Mrs. Bentley in. On Flexham Hill the horse fell—road was like ice after the frost. I was pitched out of the dogcart.

JOE. What an unlucky way to begin this day, sir.

BENTLEY [*eyeing him, abruptly*]. By Jove, what's the time? My watch jumped out of my pocket and I fear the spring's gone. Bring in your clock, will you? [*JOE goes. BENTLEY's nervousness is immediately apparent. At JOE's re-entrance with a cheap clock, which he places on the top of BENTLEY's desk, BENTLEY resumes his business air.*] Er—is that right? Only a quarter to ten?

JOE. Five minutes fast, sir. Set by the Town Hall.

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BENTLEY [*absently*]. Twenty-five minutes and then [*he becomes aware that JOE is waiting, and says briskly*] in twenty minutes or so Miss Lois should be at the station. D'you remember Miss Lois?

JOE. Nice spoken little missie, sir.

BENTLEY. Daresay she's grown up since the day her poor dad—he'd dead now—brought her in here on his way through the town. Well, well. [*Beaming.*] Now, d'you call that an unlucky day?

JOE [*unrelieved*]. In twenty minutes Sir Hector will arrive.

BENTLEY [*shamming*]. Sir Hector?

JOE. Sir Hector Adderly, sir.

BENTLEY [*as before*]. So he will, so he will. About the box—you brought it over from the bank last night? Have you seen his agent, Barrett, at all? Any idea what Sir Hector wants with it? He hasn't rung up, I suppose.

JOE. Yes, sir.

BENTLEY. Oh! [*Rapidly.*] Isn't Sir Hector coming?

JOE. Mr. Barrett rang up to say he thought Sir Hector might be a moment or two late, but he'd telephone if he couldn't come.

BENTLEY. Aha, I see.

JOE. There's a certain amount this morning, sir——

BENTLEY. Er—yes, that can wait. No, I'll see it now. [*JOE goes by door to his den.* BENTLEY sits staring morosely at the clock. JOE re-enters.

JOE. There's——

ACT ONE

BENTLEY [*sharply*]. Mr. Vyson in yet, d'you know?

JOE. No, sir.

BENTLEY [*with a sudden gust of passion*]. Damn; I say damn. Isn't he coming? He must be here this morning.

JOE. He'll be in in a minute, sir. [*Meeting BENTLEY's eye.*] At least, I *hope* he will, sir. I — [*hazarding*] he's taken to reading a foreign newspaper lately, sir.

BENTLEY [*staring*]. What on earth are you driving at?

JOE [*faltering*]. I don't know, sir, I——

BENTLEY. Neither do I. [*Change of tone.*] I don't think your clock's going. It doesn't seem to move. [*Another change.*] Well, let's get on with the work.

JOE. It is, sir. Look, sir. [*He holds up the clock.*] Watch the minute hand.

BENTLEY [*irritably*]. Take it away. Yes. I suppose it's going.

JOE [*putting the clock down and coming round to BENTLEY's left*]. First, there's the——

BENTLEY. I think I hear Mr. Vyson.

JOE. No, sir. [*Recalling him.*] Mr. Huntington and his new tannery—the contractors——

BENTLEY [*impatiently*]. What next? I know all about that——

JOE. Old Mrs. Stewart. You remember her action. She wishes——

[*The door opens and VYSON enters, hat in hand, carnation in button-hole, almost jauntily.*]

GUILTY SOULS

VYSON. Morning, Bentley. [*He nods distantly to JOE.*] Old Thunderclap been in yet? 'Fraid I might be late.

BENTLEY [*glancing at clock*]. No, Sir Hector should be here in ten minutes or so. He'll telephone if he can't come.

VYSON [*suddenly peevish*]. Wish to heaven he'd telephone then. I hate him. [BENTLEY dismisses JOE, who goes to his den.] Such a petty tyrant, too. Never content with one member of the firm—must have the whole boiling standing round kow-towing, and that when he only comes in once in a couple of years or so. I've got my own work to do.

BENTLEY [*making gentle fun*]. Taken to adding another language to your French and German? [*Absent-mindedly, covertly glancing at clock as he speaks.*] Old chattering Joe says he's discovered you in the very act of——

VYSON [*palpitant*]. What?

BENTLEY. Reading a foreign newspaper in business hours!

VYSON [*taken aback*]. Oh. [*Irritably.*] Blasted old fraud, what's it got to do with him? [*Positively.*] Ah, I know what he means now. Yes, as a matter of fact I did buy a Spanish newspaper the other day. I was looking at the—Spanish is not so hard, you know—Brazilian Business Supplement. There is fuller news sometimes of South American local conditions. The Rubber Trade. To help you with your—our—by the way, how's it going?

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BENTLEY [*briefly*]. Fine.

VYSON. I'd like to see.

BENTLEY. I'll explain it later—to-morrow. Can't this morning: Sir Hector should be here pretty soon now.

VYSON. I'll just put this away. [*Flourishes his hat, goes out, and returns. He is very affable. From time to time he slips his left hand into the right inside pocket of his coat, and each time he withdraws it his affability increases. He pulls up a chair by BENTLEY, whom he finds examining the broken watch.*] Hello!

BENTLEY. Fell out of my pocket this morning.

VYSON [*glancing at clock*]. Five minutes in which to get one of these done before——

BENTLEY [*suddenly leaning back*]. I feel rather shaken; pitched out of a dog-cart on the hill. That's how I broke my watch.

VYSON. What a pity! [*He rises.*] Curious, I don't feel like work either. And yet I did two minutes ago. Curious. Something in the air.

BENTLEY. Nonsense. What are you afraid of?

VYSON [*airily*]. Oh, one just is at times. And Sir Hector's enough to break any man's nerve.

BENTLEY [*shortly*]. I don't think so. Stand up to him.

VYSON. I've never stood up to anyone. It's not in me. I get rushed.

BENTLEY. The worse for you. Well, we shall have to wait. [*He settles grimly down into the arms of his chair. Short silence.*]

VYSON. Box ready, I see. [BENTLEY *nods*. A

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longer pause follows, during which BENTLEY, taking care not to attract VYSON's attention, turns the face of the clock away towards the room. VYSON suddenly rises.] I shan't stop if he doesn't come soon. I've got lots to do this morning. Want to take this afternoon off, if I may. If you don't see me after luncheon——

BENTLEY. Afternoon off. Certainly. But not before lunch. You had two days off in London at the end of last week.

VYSON. I want to go to my room and work.

BENTLEY. Wait in here five more minutes. Sir Hector should be in any minute now. You know how crotchety he is. Likes to have people waiting ready.

VYSON [*with a glance at his wrist-watch, suddenly agitated*]. No. No. I must go. Very pressing.

BENTLEY [*rising too*]. No. You shall not. I insist. [*Change of tone.*] Now, for my sake—I insist. [*He advances towards VYSON.*

VYSON. Well, if you put it that way. Three minutes. [*And they settle down again, VYSON counting out the time on his wrist-watch in such a way that BENTLEY cannot see him do so, and BENTLEY watching VYSON with a covert but terrific glare. Pause . . .*] Time's up!

BENTLEY. No.

[*Standing, they face each other. The telephone rings.*

VYSON [*instantly*]. He's not coming—thank heaven.

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[*He steps for the door—BENTLEY steps in front of him.*]

BENTLEY. Will you take the box back at once? No—[*nodding at the telephone*—just see what he wants, will you?

VYSON [*at the telephone*]. Hello. Vyson speaking. Lois Forester? [*To Bentley*]. Some relation of yours, Bentley—says she's missed your wife at the station, and wants to know may she come here.

BENTLEY. Relation? Come here? What—

VYSON [*in haste*]. Oh, yes. He says yes. There! [*Cuts off.*] Now I must go.

BENTLEY. She can't come here. Sir Hector—

[*VYSON is making for the door to the right, but before he reaches it it opens in his face and SIR HECTOR enters abruptly.*]

SIR HECTOR. Who the devil!—running into me! Ah, Vyson. Good mornin', Mister Vyson. I rang: no answer. So in I walked.

VYSON. The telephone! they must have thought—

SIR HECTOR [*over his shoulder*]. Come in, Rupert. Don't hang about. [*RUPERT stands in the doorway. BENTLEY, very taut, advances. SIR HECTOR treats him with noticeably more courtesy than he uses toward VYSON.*] Mornin', Bentley.

BENTLEY. Good morning, Sir Hector. Leg better, I trust. I hear you had a fall.

SIR HECTOR. Had a fall! Worst damn toss I ever took. That's why I'm here. Tell you in a minute. Where's my son? [*Turns round.*]

Here, Rupert—you've met Bentley and this other chap—what's-his-name?—Vyson, before.

[RUPERT, *a contrast to his hard-featured, foxy-eyed, thin groom of a father, is a fresh-looking, thoughtful, shy youth of twenty.*

RUPERT. How d'you do, Mr. Vyson? How d'you do, Mr. Bentley? [To VYSON.] You play the violin, don't you? I saw you in the street carrying a case.

VYSON. Yes, yes, I do. [Turning to SIR HECTOR.] I'm sorry, Sir Hector, I must go.

SIR HECTOR [*who has seated himself at the table, says dryly*]. Go! You can't.

VYSON. I'm sorry, sir, I——

[SIR HECTOR *turns an eye on BENTLEY.*

BENTLEY. Really, I——

[*He looks distressfully at VYSON.*

VYSON. But——

SIR HECTOR [*jumps up and snaps*]. You hear what your partner says? [VYSON *reluctantly sits down. They are now grouped, with SIR HECTOR reseated at the middle of the table, having BENTLEY and VYSON at opposite ends, BENTLEY being between VYSON and the door. RUPERT stands between BENTLEY and SIR HECTOR.*] What about your clerk? He may be useful. Nothing confidential to-day. [*He sniggers rather grimly.*

BENTLEY. Certainly.

[*He rises, touches the bell, and sits down again.*

SIR HECTOR. Good. Now I'll take off my gloves. [*Does so, and collects the eyes of BENT-*

ACT ONE

LEY and VYSON.] Doubtless you wonder what the devil I want here. I'm not often in, eh? Well, now I'll tell you—I've come to cheat somebody. Ha! ha! [*Rubs his hands and, warming to his work, speaks in a fast, clear gabble.*] Mr. Bentley and Mr. er—Vyson, I'm not as young as I was, and what with pettifoggin' politicians deliberately bankruptin' the class that is the backbone of the nation; [*JOE enters from the left, and at a sign from BENTLEY takes up a position standing between VYSON and SIR HECTOR*] what with the people carryin' on as if the Realm belonged to 'em and the Church as far as I can make out with its damned socialist parsons backing 'em up, what with virgins fresh from school trottin' out the statistics of prostitooshun at you, wives takin' an interest in politics, and grooms answ'rin' you back, I've come to the conclusion that my day is done. [*He looks round, hoping for contradiction.*] I won't be dictated to—they can dictate to another if they like—my son here seems to like 'em, they can dictate to him—but I'll go on huntin' and, if need be, break my neck like a gentleman——

BENTLEY. You wish to——

SIR HECTOR. Be so good as to let me have me say out, Mister Bentley. Then there's death duties. I never heard the like. Disgracefu'. I never liked Mr. Gladstone, but I will say this: he opposed—Mr. Vyson, you're not listenin'—kindly pay attention to me: that's what you're here for, that's what I pay you for. Thank you. As I was sayin'—these iniquitous Death Duties.

Well, I'll avoid 'em. I'll cheat the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I will—— [*He rises excitedly.*

BENTLEY. You wish to make over——

SIR HECTOR. Not all at once. Noa. Noa. You don't catch me. [*He sits down.*] I want to see if this young man [*nodding back at his son*] is as big a fool as he looks and talks. There should be a pretty sort o' sum locked up in this box. [*He raps it.*] I'll make over the contents. Then if I break my neck out huntin' the farther side of seven years from now the Chancellor won't get a penny out of *this* little chest. The young chap shall have some of it for the scientific business methods he yammers about. He's by way of bein' a geologist: goes about with a little hammer, and is for ever talkin' of oil as the fuel of the future or some bunkum o' that sort. Very well. First, we'll see what we've got. You've a list, Bentley. I've a list. [*Pulls a list out of his pocket.*] Mr. Vyson shall read out the contents. We'll check the contents, and when that's over Mr. Bentley shall advise me what to sell and what to convert. Now we'll get to it. Sit down, Mr. Vyson. You're wanted to read out the contents. You can't go. [*VYSON, who had half risen, sits down again; SIR HECTOR collects the eyes, as before.*] Ah, the key. [*Feeling in his pockets.*] Damn, I'm losing my memory or something. Got the list, but forgotten my key.

BENTLEY. Get our key, Joe.

VYSON. Let me.

[*He rises and gets the key, closely watched*

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by JOE, and is about to make for the door when he thinks better of it under the severe eye of SIR HECTOR and resumes his seat.

SIR HECTOR. Now.

[Throws open the lid and leans back, pencil in one hand and list in the other.]

BENTLEY [leaning forward]. Now.

[JOE, covertly watching VYSON, clears his throat.]

SIR HECTOR. Wake up, Mr. Vyson.

[VYSON takes up the first package and scrutinizes the writing.]

VYSON [reading]. Consolidated Turkish——

BENTLEY. Right. [Ticks his list.]

SIR HECTOR. Right.

VYSON [as before]. Mortgages on Leeson's Refineries.

BENTLEY. Right. They will have to be called in, Sir Hector. Let's see the date. Yes.

SIR HECTOR. Very well, and the proceeds will be worth damn little, anyway. Go on, Mr. Vyson.

VYSON. Royal Steam. [They nod and tick.] British Honduras and Venezuelan together.

SIR HECTOR. Right.

BENTLEY. Right.

VYSON. Patent Hydraulic.

SIR HECTOR. Right.

BENTLEY [after a pause]. Right.

VYSON. Eugenia Cotton Mills.

SIR HECTOR [promptly]. Right. Well, Bentley, you're gettin' slow. [Bending over to show

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BENTLEY *the place, having his joke.*] Brrr, Bentley—booze? Your hand's shaking.

BENTLEY [*coldly*]. I was pitched out of a trap this morning.

SIR HECTOR. Sorry. Shall we stop?

[*VYSON rises.*

BENTLEY [*perceiving VYSON's hands clenched and a look of bitter exasperation on his face*]. No, thanks. We'll go in and make an end now.

[*VYSON relapses into his seat.*

SIR HECTOR [*briskly cheerful*]. Now, Vyson.

VYSON. Premier Ironstone.

BENTLEY. Right.

SIR HECTOR. Right.

VYSON. River Navigation.

BENTLEY. Right.

SIR HECTOR. Right.

VYSON. Cowdell's Ironware.

BENTLEY [*nervously*]. Right.

SIR HECTOR [*pausing*]. When are we coming to the big block? I've only three left on my list. How much more in the box? [*VYSON looks. To BENTLEY.*] Cowdell's Ironware, did he say? Right. [*To VYSON.*] Yes?

VYSON. There's only one more, sir—unless all three are in one package. [*Opens package.*] Merioneth Lower Deep.

BENTLEY. Right. [*To SIR HECTOR.*] Right?

SIR HECTOR. Merioneth Lower Deep. What the — ! Right.

VYSON [*briefly*]. That's all. [*Shuts the box and rises.*] Now, if you will allow me, Sir Hec-

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tor. *[Holds out his hand.]*

SIR HECTOR *[staring at VYSON]*. What's this? *[Staring at his list.]* I've got two more. Japanese Government Bearer Bonds marked "Ko-go," Nos. 560,080 to 560,420, and Red Valley Bearer Bonds Nos. 160 to 180. You've got 'em on your list, haven't you, Bentley?

BENTLEY. Certainly.

SIR HECTOR. That's odd.

BENTLEY. Vyson, look again.

VYSON. The box is empty, I tell you.

SIR HECTOR. This is serious. *[To BENTLEY.]* The box came straight from the bank?

BENTLEY. Joe——

JOE *[stepping forward into the circle, for all three have risen]*. Yes, sir. I brought the box over last night, and it's lain in this room ever since.

SIR HECTOR. Did you open it?

[JOE looks at VYSON.]

JOE. I didn't touch the box. Mr. Vyson knows more about the box than I do.

SIR HECTOR *[losing his temper]*. What the hell d'you mean? *[He seizes JOE by the shoulder.]*

RUPERT *[intervening]*. One moment. The documents are probably somewhere about. *[To JOE.]* Now, think where they are. *[Taking his father aside.]* Leave it to me. If I don't find the money it's I who lose it. I'll deal with that clerk. Go and talk to Bentley—he looks terribly cut up. *[SIR HECTOR goes over to BENTLEY. RUPERT takes JOE by the elbow and says softly.]* Now, quick, what d'you know?

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JOE [*softly*]. Fetch the bank manager. I'll fix him in a minute.

RUPERT. Whom?

JOE. Vyson. It's him.

RUPERT. What! Mind what you say.

[*The others begin to search the room.*]

JOE. Let me speak to your father in the next room. Meanwhile you telephone to Smithson's Bank: Wentworth is the name of the man you want.

[RUPERT *nods*.]

RUPERT. Er— Father. [SIR HECTOR *comes over*.] Just a moment. [*Softly*.] The clerk here wishes to speak alone with you. [*Aloud, his eye on VYSON*.] I think it's a confession.

BENTLEY [*rushes forward, crying*]. It can't be. Joe's been here thirty years. I know he's honest.

RUPERT [*coolly*]. We shall see. There's a room across the passage.

BENTLEY. But——

[*Meeting JOE's eye, his protest dies away and the tail of his eye swings round to where VYSON stands in an attitude of barely controlled impatience.*]

JOE [*to BENTLEY*]. I'll clear myself, sir, never fear. [*To RUPERT*.] Mr. Vyson's room.

SIR HECTOR [*going to BENTLEY*]. I thought so. The lower classes nowadays are all hypocrites and thieves. [*To RUPERT*.] You're coming, Rupert?

RUPERT. No, he asks for you alone.

SIR HECTOR. Well, that's pluck if it doesn't mean he's goin' to whine. I hate whinin'.

[*He goes out with JOE.*]

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RUPERT. Now, Bentley? Nothing found? Quite so. [*Pause.*]. I do dislike rows. However, I expect it'll be cleared up in a minute.

[*Takes up the telephone book.*]

BENTLEY [*looking at VYSON with an effort*]. I'm sorry for poor Joe. I find it hard to believe . . . [RUPERT goes to the telephone.] Not for the police? Not yet, surely?

VYSON [*to BENTLEY, in a low voice*]. For heaven's sake, don't get them in or I shall be here for ever. [RUPERT, *overhearing, glances at him.*]

RUPERT. No, for the bank manager. Hello. Give me Hinkson nine five. Yes. Quick.

VYSON. I say, Bentley, you had——

BENTLEY [*like a knife*]. Ssh!—he's telephoning.

RUPERT. Hinkson nine five. Mr. Wentworth, please.

VYSON. But—— [RUPERT gestures.

RUPERT. Is that you, Mr. Wentworth? Rupert Adderly speaking. Vice-Manager? No, I must have Wentworth. Quick.

VYSON. But, Bentley, you had that [*nodding at box*] over a week ago when we settled to speculate.

BENTLEY. I know. Sssss! Solicitors don't—

RUPERT. Hello. Are you there? Is that Wentworth?

VYSON. But you had the thing.

BENTLEY. Of course I did. Do you suspect me? [*Behind his hand.*] Joe is done for. Don't ruin the firm. [*Nodding at RUPERT.*] There!

RUPERT. Ah, is that you, Mr. Wentworth?

Rupert Adderly speaking. I'm at Bentley and Vyson's with my father. Yes, with my father. Will you please step across? Yes. Now. Step straight in. First door on right. Yes, at once. Vital. [*Replacing receiver.*] There!

[JOE and SIR HECTOR return. SIR HECTOR's face is flushed. There is a light in his eyes. He keeps on smacking his lips.

SIR HECTOR [*placing his hand on JOE's shoulder*]. Now we shall get at it, I think.

[*Glares round on each in turn, finally fixing VYSON with a surly stare.*

RUPERT [*to his father.*] He's coming. He'll be here in a moment.

SIR HECTOR. Good thing too. I intend to sift this to the bottom.

[*He resumes his glare at VYSON. VYSON turns away toward the light. SIR HECTOR looks at BENTLEY as much as to say "You'll see what you'll see!" BENTLEY stands still, feet wide apart, hands behind back, looking at the ground. RUPERT fidgets. JOE watches VYSON. VYSON has slipped his hand into his coat's inner pocket as if he were fingering and guarding a treasure. He moves up his wrist, stares at his watch, and moves his lips as if he were praying. Silence.*

JOE [*whispering to RUPERT*]. He's clutching something in his pocket. Poison?

RUPERT [*on tip-toe, shaking his head*]. Ssh. No, no.

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[*The door is briskly opened and the bank manager, WENTWORTH, a sharp, dapper, stocky little man steps in.*]

WENTWORTH. Morning, Sir Hector. [SIR HECTOR *grunts.*] Morning, gentlemen—what can I do for you?

SIR HECTOR [*lifting box*]. Know anythin' about this box o' mine?

WENTWORTH. Mr. Park here——

BENTLEY [*explaining*]. Joe, Sir Hector.

WENTWORTH. Mr. Park came over for it last night.

SIR HECTOR. Anybody else had it lately?

WENTWORTH. Mr. Vyson took it a week ago. Said the firm wanted it.

JOE. There.

VYSON. Let me explain.

SIR HECTOR. You can make your explanation later. Let's have the other man's story first.

VYSON [*lamely*]. I—Mr. Bentley told me——

[SIR HECTOR *looks at* BENTLEY.]

BENTLEY. All right, Paul. [*To* WENTWORTH.] Go on.

WENTWORTH. I gave it him. I hold his receipt for it. He returned it the same morning—in about three quarters of an hour, I should judge—with the firm's box which he had taken out at the same time.

SIR HECTOR. What more?

WENTWORTH. There isn't any more. [*Silence.*] Why, is there anything wrong? Is anything missing?

GUILTY SOULS

SIR HECTOR. Yes, there is.

RUPERT. We *think* there is, Father.

WENTWORTH. I'm sure the bank will welcome the fullest investigation. I should like to say that the bank has no knowledge whatever of what such a box may contain.

BENTLEY. I gave the order for Sir Hector's box to be brought over—as Mr. Vyson remarked just now. I wished to find out if any mortgage needed calling in—as indeed we discovered one lot did. I was out when Mr. Vyson brought the box back. I came into this room——

JOE [*excitedly*]. But I wasn't. I saw Mr. Vyson.

RUPERT [*to JOE*]. One moment. Let Mr. Bentley finish. You shall tell us all you know in a minute.

BENTLEY. I came into this room and found Mr. Vyson waiting, with Sir Hector's box open. Oh, and also the firm's box [*looking at VYSON*]. We had a little conversation in which we joked about the weight of Sir Hector's box.

RUPERT [*cutting in*]. I see it all. It's quite simple. Whoever handled the documents in our box must have replaced them in the firm's by mistake: the boxes would be alike except for the name on the outside.

WENTWORTH. It is worth trying. [*Lifts telephone.*] Hinkson nine five. Hello. That you, Mr. Jennings? Wentworth speaking. Send a man over at once with Bentley and Vyson's box to the firm's office—first door on right. Tell him to run.

[*Cuts off.*]

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RUPERT. I expect that's it. [*To WENTWORTH.*] Thank you.

WENTWORTH. Shall I stay, gentlemen?

SIR HECTOR. Most certainly you will. I'm not at all of my son's mind. Bentley, you were sayin'?

BENTLEY. We were joking about the weight of Sir Hector's box. We chatted a minute or two and then Mr. Vyson went to his room and I ran for Joe.

JOE [*excited again, to BENTLEY*]. You asked me whether anybody had been in and I said nobody but Mr. Vyson, and then I tried to tell you what I'd seen. [*Turning to the others.*] But before I'd got out more than a sentence Mr. Oswald told me I'd got Mr. Vyson on the brain. Well, he'll have to believe me now after what I saw and those bonds being missing.

BENTLEY [*calmly, with a friendly glance at VYSON*]. Well, and what did you see? Let's hear the worst.

JOE [*elaborately*]. I'd 'ad my eye on Vyson some time.

VYSON. Bah!

BENTLEY. *Mister Vyson, please, Joe.*

JOE. I'd heard him say things. Why, that very morning, happening to come in when he was talking with Mr. Oswald, I heard him cursing my old master, his grandad, for putting him into this job. Business and business men—not good enough for him, I suppose! But when I gets into the room what do I see but Mr. Vyson standing in front of

the two boxes with a most wicked expression. When he sees me he starts and puts a bit o' paper face down on the table, but it slips off and he tries to pick it up so as I shan't see. But I got it and sees it is Sir Hector's list. Then Mr. Vyson hurries out to hang up his hat, or so he says. [*Banging the table.*] Now I says roundly, and I don't care who hears me—Mr. Vyson had those bearer bonds in his pocket when he went to hang up his hat. [BENTLEY *looks very serious.*

VYSON. It's a lie. I never did such a thing. Bentley—you don't believe that. You can't, because——

[*He suddenly stops short, for BENTLEY, as if unconsciously, has made the gesture of moving papers from one box to another and now stands pondering and slowly shaking his head.*

BENTLEY [*looking up*]. Of course not, Paul. But we must sift this. Someone here is lying.

[*He gazes significantly at JOE. The look is not lost on VYSON.*

RUPERT. It strikes me that if Mr. Vyson had taken the securities he would have had to chance Mr. Bentley going through the list and finding them gone.

VYSON [*too emphatic*]. Of course. [*To SIR HECTOR.*] You see, it's absurd.

[*SIR HECTOR turns his back on him.*

JOE [*bursting out*]. But Mr. Vyson didn't do that. He must have taken the box away. There

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was only one box—the firm's—when Mr. Bentley rang for me.

VYSON. But I left Bentley with both boxes.

JOE. You liar! [*Turning to SIR HECTOR.*] Listen to him! Shuffling!

BENTLEY [*quickly and softly to VYSON*]. A little more rope.

JOE [*beside himself*]. Two boxes. So you say! I saw you going away with both boxes a few minutes later.

RUPERT. How did that happen?

JOE. Mr. Bentley rang for me to pull the blind down—it had stuck, as it sometimes does. [*Pointing.*] That blind there. As I was pulling it down I saw Mr. Vyson go out with both boxes.

[*A rap on the door.*]

WENTWORTH. Allow me. That's the firm's box. [*He goes to the door and takes the box. To a man outside.*] Thank you.

BENTLEY. You open it, Mr. Adderly. Here's the key.

[*Takes the key from the drawer in the desk.*]

VYSON [*to BENTLEY, as they bend over the box*]. Can't I get away? This will mean giving evidence. I mean—I simply must go.

BENTLEY [*eyeing him closely*]. If you don't want to stay your only chance is to keep quiet.

RUPERT. No sign of the securities here. . . .

SIR HECTOR. Absurd waste of time. Now I suppose you're satisfied, Rupert, that it wasn't a curious accident.

WENTWORTH [*loudly*]. All this is very well, gentlemen—all this talk of that box and this box. What we want to know is, where are the bonds now? Now, what exactly were these bearer bonds?

SIR HECTOR. That's the talk. That's a better line. The bonds were [*taking the list from RUPERT*] Japanese Government Bearer Bonds marked "Ko-go" Nos. 560,080 to 560,420, and Red Valley Bearer Bonds Nos. 160 to 180.

WENTWORTH. That's simple enough. I know where they are. Mr. Vyson brought them to sell through our brokers late last Tuesday morning—when he brought the boxes back, in fact.

[BENTLEY *turns away*.]

SIR HECTOR. What! }
RUPERT. I say! } [Simultaneously.]

JOE [*crowing*]. I told you so.

VYSON [*recklessly*]. Yes, I did. Mr. Bentley told me to! In the name of the firm. I can explain it all.

[BENTLEY *looks at him*.]

WENTWORTH [*dryly*]. Aren't you rather late in telling us this, Mr. Vyson? Have you forgotten how you came to me the very afternoon before this —er loss: Monday afternoon, in fact, and tried and tried, almost with tears in your eyes, to raise £140 on some worthless copper shares? Now I note that for one of the blocks of missing bonds I gave you just under one hundred and fifty.

SIR HECTOR [*advancing on VYSON*]. What's this? What's this? Explain.

VYSON. I—— Bentley——

ACT ONE

SIR HECTOR [*towering*]. Tries to borrow off the bank, and then runs off with my money!

RUPERT. By George, it looks bad. Steady, father. What d'you say to that, Vyson?

VYSON [*beginning utterly to lose his head*]. I gave the four thousand to Bentley.

RUPERT. Never mind the four thousand at present. What did you do with that hundred and fifty we've traced?

VYSON. I kept it. Mr. Bentley told me to. [*Becoming hysterical.*] It's all so simple. That's the truth, can't you see it's the truth?

[*Glances towards the door.*]

SIR HECTOR. Oh, so you want to go, do you? Very curious—you've played that tune ever since I came. [*Losing his temper.*] Where are my four thousand pounds? They were last seen in your hands. You acknowledge stealin' a hundred and fifty and you attempt to blacken your partner at the same time.

VYSON [*wildly*]. I never even looked at what I gave the bank manager. He was just going to lunch. I was so excited. I was thinking of something else.

WENTWORTH. That's so. I said, "What are these?" He said, "I don't know: Bentley told me the firm wants to raise money on them at once for a client." All the time he was dancing round the room and looking at the map of South America on the wall. [*BENTLEY makes an involuntary sign of having guessed something.*]

When I spoke to him of dropping a bit on the transaction he said—which struck me as odd, “Never mind, I shall get my money.” “I,” mind you.

SIR HECTOR. That’s done it. And now you want to do a bolt. Embezzlement, and then flight. I’ll teach you.

[He brandishes his fists in VYSON’s face.]

RUPERT. Father.

VYSON. Don’t let him touch me. I can’t stand it. Ah! *[He moves round the table.]*

SIR HECTOR *[breaking away from his son’s restraining arm]*. He knows he cornered. He’s tryin’ to get away. *[SIR HECTOR grabs at VYSON.]*

VYSON. I can stand no more!

[He runs for the door.]

JOE. Stop thief! *[VYSON snatches at the door.]*

BENTLEY *[to RUPERT, as both turn]*. South America!

[In the doorway VYSON runs into LOIS]

FORSTER. *The second’s delay is fatal.*

SIR HECTOR *drags him back.*

SIR HECTOR. I’ve got you. *[He cuffs him.]* I’ll teach you. Damn this leg, or you wouldn’t ’a’ got so far.

VYSON. Hands off! Stop, or I’ll kill you!

[VYSON struggles.]

SIR HECTOR. Hysterical puppy. *[Twists his arm.]* You’ll break it.

RUPERT *[to VYSON]*. Don’t struggle. *[To SIR HECTOR.]* Let go, father.

[SIR HECTOR lets him go.]

ACT ONE

VYSON [*faces round and meets the eyes of Lois looking at him*]. I wish I were dead!

LOIS [*who has stooped and picked a packet off the floor, speaking very gently*]. I think you dropped something.

[VYSON *quickly takes the packet and puts it in his inside pocket*.]

SIR HECTOR [*staring at Lois*]. Who the devil's this?

BENTLEY. Lois—would you wait a moment?

LOIS. I'm sorry. Clara must have gone to the Great Eastern. I was waiting in the passage. I didn't like . . . shall I go?

BENTLEY. A few minutes . . . there's a room just opposite.

[LOIS *goes out after a glance at RUPERT and a long look of compassion at VYSON*.]

SIR HECTOR. We wish to see what fell from your pocket.

VYSON. You have no right.

SIR HECTOR. We—I—mean to have it. Now then. [*He steps forward*.]

VYSON [*suddenly hysterical*]. You shall not have it. I'd die rather. Don't touch me: I'll kill myself.

[*He clutches himself, and stands away with bared teeth*.]

RUPERT [*gently*]. Come, Vyson, *do* see reason. I know things are against you, but don't be hysterical. [*Persuasively*.] Give it up! If you don't they'll think it's something guilty, if it's nothing we shall see it's nothing.

GUILTY SOULS

VYSON [*pulling out the packet and throwing it on the floor with a jerk*]. There, take it—and my life and my liberty and my hope with it. [*He turns away.*] I've nothing left now.

[*JOE dives for it. RUPERT and SIR HECTOR crowd round JOE. The packet is divided.*]

SIR HECTOR. Hello. Foreign writin'. Let's see.

RUPERT [*unfolding*]. A passport.

[*BENTLEY, leaning over their shoulders, rubs his chin thoughtfully. Then he turns away and listens, with his back to them and to VYSON.*]

RUPERT. Brazilian visa: granted in London on Saturday.

SIR HECTOR [*to JOE*]. And yours?

JOE. Tickets, I think.

SIR HECTOR. What date?

RUPERT [*looking over*]. Sailing to-night.

[*Silence.*]

VYSON [*turning about*]. Well, have you finished? Is my poor little secret out?

RUPERT [*still incredulous*]. But why?

JOE. Cut and run, he would. Cut and run—that's what it looks like.

RUPERT. I fear you're right. Guilty. Poor Bentley.

SIR HECTOR [*on whom the full import has dawned, roaring*]. I see it all. [*He turns round.*] Makin' a bolt for it with my four thousand sent on waiting for you at the other end? That's it, eh? [*To JOE.*] Slip out and get a policeman.

ACT ONE

[JOE *nods and goes.*

VYSON [*to SIR HECTOR and RUPERT*]. Now I suppose you're satisfied. You've hounded me like one of your poor, damned, starving foxes. And you're all wrong. I didn't take the money: I only wanted to get out of all this—away from such faces and such minds as yours, heaven help me! Come, march me off to prison, you Justice of the Peace, you Justice's son. Never mind whether I'm innocent or not. Holloa, holloa, gone away! You've lost money and you want blood. I know you. [*With a sudden gust of impotent rage.*] God blast and damn you to eternity.

[*He shakes his open hands at them. The door opens. CLARA comes in and stops, amazed.*

CLARA. Where's Lois? . . . why, what's the matter?

VYSON [*with extraordinary bitterness*]. Nothing's the matter, Mrs. Bentley.

CLARA. Why, Mr. Vyson—

VYSON. The gallant Sir Hector here is going to charge me with embezzlement—that's all.

CLARA. Oswald, what's he mean?

SIR HECTOR. It means for once he's tellin' the truth, madam. Here, you. Come in. [*A policeman has appeared at the door, with JOE behind him.*] You know me. You've seen me on the bench. I wish to charge—

VYSON [*bursting out*]. It's not fair. I'm innocent. Before heaven, I'm innocent.

SIR HECTOR [*in his magistrate's manner*].

Silence. [*To the policeman.*] Constable, you see who are present. You will take their names. My son, Rupert—same address as mine.

VYSON [*appealingly*]. Mrs. Bentley!

[*LOIS has come in. The women kiss. LOIS motions for MRS. BENTLEY to go, but MRS. BENTLEY shakes her head, pointing to BENTLEY. Then they follow the scene—glancing from face to face—CLARA chiefly watching BENTLEY with a protective glance, and LOIS watching VYSON.*

VYSON [*appealingly as before*]. Young Ad-
derly.

RUPERT [*coldly*]. I'm sorry.

[*VYSON turns to JOE, but JOE only stares back at him with impudence. VYSON turns to BENTLEY.*

VYSON [*with terrible anguish in his voice*]. Bentley! [*No answer. BENTLEY had turned away and hidden his face when VYSON cried out "I'm innocent." Now he stands with his hands hanging at his sides and iron face, averted. VYSON takes a step toward him and cries again.*] Bentley! [*No answer. VYSON casts himself on his knees behind BENTLEY.*] Bentley, do turn round. [*Child-like.*] Speak to me. You do believe in me, Bentley. You must. I didn't do it. I know I am capable of it, but I didn't do it. I only wanted to get away. I gave you the four thousand, you know I did. It was your money. Say you believe

ACT ONE

in me, Bentley. Nobody's ever believed in me but you. Mother died, father hated me—there's no one trusted me but you and the girl with whom I was to go to Brazil to-night. To-night! [*Pause.*] Oh, Bentley, Bentley, say something! [*He bows down, he stretches out his right hand, he takes BENTLEY's cuff and attempts to kiss it. BENTLEY moves his hand away. Pause. VYSON keeps his head bowed. Silence. The policeman coughs. VYSON raises his head.*] It's over. Blackness. I'll never believe in man again. [*Standing up facing SIR HECTOR, wearily.*] Come on. Charge me, then.

SIR HECTOR [*clearing his throat*]. This is very painful. I'm sorry these ladies . . . [*To policeman.*] I desire to give Mr. Vyson into custody on a charge of embezzlement. You shall have details at the station. [*The policeman hesitates.*

VYSON [*turning*]. For the last time, Bentley. [*No answer. A pause. Then VYSON says steadily.*] I see it now. Bentley, I believe you did it.

[*BENTLEY turns round very slowly and looks VYSON in the face. His features are solemn and his eyes full of pain.*

BENTLEY [*sorrowfully*]. You know who did it.

VYSON [*with his hand to his forehead, falters*]. My brain turns . . . Could . . . ?

[*The policeman approaches.*

POLICEMAN [*attracting his attention*]. Please, sir.

VYSON [*stretching out his hands automatically*

as if for handcuffs]. I shan't bite. Do your duty.

RUPERT [*before the policeman steps forward*]. You'd better take charge of this evidence.

[He hands the policeman the tickets and the passport. The policeman places them in his breast pocket. When VYSON see this he covers his face with his hands and begins to sob without a sound.]

POLICEMAN. Now, sir. I advise you to come quietly, and I wish to caution you, sir, that anything you say henceforward may be used as evidence against you.

VYSON. I've nothing to say. Let me get my violin. *[He points to the door on the right.]*

POLICEMAN. Violin! You can't take that, sir.

[SIR HECTOR goes to BENTLEY.]

VYSON [*weakly*]. Can't I?—not even the bow? *[The policeman shakes his head.]* Not even that. *[More weakly still.]* Very well.

[The two begin to walk round the table.]

POLICEMAN. Anything more, sir?

[BENTLEY and SIR HECTOR stand aside to let the policeman and VYSON pass. VYSON as he passes BENTLEY clasps his hands over his face and rises on tip-toe like a man stepping along a tight-rope over an abyss. RUPERT follows.]

SIR HECTOR [*to the group*]. Wait out there a moment, will you? *[To BENTLEY.]* I think the case is pretty strong against him, eh? Old Mr. Vyson must have been in his second childhood when he interested himself in that young man—

ACT ONE

anyone can see he's not straight. It's hard on you. But set your mind at rest—we won't desert your firm: more especially now it's yours, and yours only. [*To those outside.*] Coming. [SIR HECTOR proffers his hand. BENTLEY does not appear to see it. At the door SIR HECTOR turns and cries.] You'll be coming, of course?

[*He goes. LOIS walks to the window.*

CLARA goes silently up to BENTLEY and puts her arms round his neck.

LOIS [*murmuring*]. How awful. [*Louder, as she sees the little group passing.*] He's got no hat. I do hope people won't stare at him.

CLARA [*at last, in a low voice*]. Well?

BENTLEY [*breaking away and lifting one arm, passionately*]. He brought it on himself! He brought it on himself! [*He staggers to the table and leans against it with eyes closed. Then he lifts his head suddenly, saying, with savage resolution.*] Give me my hat. What's done can't be undone.

[*And, taking his hat from his wife's hand, he hurries out.*

QUICK CURTAIN



ACT TWO

ACT TWO

BENTLEY'S large, rather dim and gloomy room, used as dining-room and study. At the back two pseudo-Gothic, 1830, pointed windows, with low bookshelves beneath, looking into a conservatory. Between these windows a double glass door having a light divided vertically in two above it. In the right wall far back a door. Near this door, down stage, a revolving bookcase with a telephone upon it. Between this bookcase and the proscenium a writing-table with a light armchair drawn up to it. On the writing-table writing apparatus, and on top of the writing-table, above the pigeon-holes, etc., a crucifix about fifteen inches high, in ebony, the figure of ivory, and on each side of the crucifix an iron candlestick with long tapering candles. In the left wall, far back, a red baize swing door. Further forward in the same wall a hatch with let-down shelf. Between the hatch and the proscenium a solid sideboard. In the centre of the proscenium a fender, indicating by the glow upon it the presence of a fire. Between the fender and the sideboard a deep arm-chair covered with dark cretonne and turned to the fire. Behind this chair's back the dining-table with four chairs set to it. In the centre of the room, but well forward near the fender, a footstool. Between the footstool and the chair at the writing-desk a small table with a cigarette box, etc., and a large photograph frame with RUPERT'S photograph within turned toward the fire. The switch for the triple electric bulb, which depends from the ceiling, is by the door in the right-hand wall.

GUILTY SOULS

It is late in the afternoon at the close of October. A tranquil golden light fills the scene and incidentally glitters upon the pince-nez of CLARA, who is regarding the crucifix on BENTLEY'S desk with an air of judicial doubt. Time has told on her—her hair is not quite such a perfect gold, and her face is decidedly more severe. She is still, however, extremely good-looking.

VOICE [*in the conservatory*]. These calceolarias will want watering.

CLARA. The handyman had better do it—I suppose he can.

[LOIS, who is now twenty-three, emerges from the conservatory—dark, slim, calm-featured.

LOIS. I should think so—though he doesn't seem very willing to do anything but sulk in the pantry. He's very silent.

CLARA [*pointing*]. Pssh . . . He can hear.

LOIS. That hatch. [*She shuts it down.*] It's all right. He's out or upstairs. He keeps out of our way.

CLARA. I like that in a servant. He's been here a month now, and I never see him except at meals. Oswald made a good choice in him—except for the red hair. I will say the fellow does his work well. In that respect he's a treasure. I'm glad I engaged him and thank heaven, unlike the last, he doesn't try to curry favour with Oswald.

LOIS. Currying favour wouldn't go very far with Oswald just now.

CLARA [*sitting wearily down on the footstool*].

ACT TWO

How many times did he speak to you at breakfast this morning?

LOIS. Twice.

CLARA. Twice to you and once to me.

[*She bows her head.*]

LOIS [*coming over*]. He's really very unhappy.

CLARA. He makes others unhappy and doesn't seem to care that he does so.

LOIS. He doesn't notice it. When your eyes are full of tears you can't see.

CLARA. It should not be so.

LOIS. It *is* so.

CLARA. He mentioned yesterday that he'd made another coup a month ago. He ought to be pleased, but he isn't. They're a wonderful business combination, those two—Oswald and Rupert. How glad I am they went into oil that was a dull, unpleasant town . . . why, we're almost rich.

[*She sighs.*]

LOIS. Then it isn't money he's troubled about. I never really thought it was. Rupert says——

CLARA. "Rupert says." So you've discussed him with Rupert?

LOIS. No, Clara. But I asked Rupert whether Oswald was very busy at the office. I thought he'd know, as partner, if Oswald was overworking.

CLARA. And what does Rupert say?

LOIS. Rupert says he's hardly ever at the office.

CLARA. What! But he goes down every day.

LOIS. Not to the office. The week before last he only did two half-days. At the lunch hour

Rupert saw him coming out of the Roman Church. His face was curious, Rupert says. If he hadn't known Oswald so well he'd have said he'd been crying.

CLARA. It's not possible. Rupert must be mistaken.

LOIS. No. He's sure it was Oswald: though Oswald pretended not to see him.

CLARA. I'm sure that can't be true—Oswald—oh, no: that's not him at all!

LOIS. Then, too, he goes walking. Last Tuesday I came on him as I was bicycling. He was walking with his head down. I kept behind. Every now and then he hit the hedge very softly with his stick. It was plain he was arguing with himself. I turned back. He never saw me.

CLARA. Why didn't you tell me?

LOIS. I didn't like to worry you.

CLARA. I think I should have been told. [*Looking down.*] What would you do if, for instance, you were in my shoes?

LOIS [*considering*]. I don't know.

CLARA [*looking up*]. Don't you love him?

LOIS. Of course I do. But I'm not his wife. Love makes one so helpless.

CLARA. Why do you say that?

LOIS [*guardedly*]. I have found it so. But if I were strong enough I think I should ask to share. But the opportunity to share does not always come. [*Disturbed.*] How odd your eyes were then.

CLARA. Tiredness. You are so honest, so simple, Lois, you surprise me.

ACT TWO

[*She kisses her. LOIS goes into the conservatory, leaving the doors open.*

LOIS. He should be here any moment now.

CLARA. He'll come by the short cut, I expect, and over the lawn . . . Lois, he's so difficult. I seem to have got out of touch with trouble . . .

LOIS. There: he's coming

[*She re-enters.*

CLARA. He isn't rational. I *do* hate men when they're moody. It's so easy to be sunny. Why should they be moody? Everything's quite simple and sane if you are only simple and sane toward it.

LOIS [*looks at her in silence and then says*]. Aren't you going to try to share?

CLARA. But I do.

LOIS. He'll be here in a moment: *do* try.

CLARA [*a little shortly*]. Thank you. [*Change of tone.*] I can't face him—not this minute. I'll just run up and change—[*casting a covert glance at LOIS' dress*—I know he likes a pretty dress.

LOIS [*protesting*]. Don't, Clara.

CLARA [*at the door*]. But, my dear child, men are men. It can do no harm.

LOIS [*distressed*]. Oh!

[*LOIS goes over to the little table and picks up a book. BENTLEY, a good deal aged, enters through the conservatory, and slowly closes the doors after him. His face is moody, his eyes full of weariness and pain. He tosses down his hat as if in disgust at entering this room again.*

BENTLEY. Hello, Lois.

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LOIS. Hello, Oswald.

[She sits down on the footstool.]

BENTLEY. Where's Clara? I want to see her.

LOIS. Upstairs. *[She rises.]* I think she wants to have a talk with you. She'll be down in a minute.

[She sits down again. BENTLEY stands staring, hands in coat pockets, at the floor. LOIS glances at BENTLEY, then picks up a book from the small table, opens it, and glances at him once more. BENTLEY wanders over to her and stands looking down at her. She looks at the book again.]

LOIS *[glancing gently up]*. Why have you underlined this—do I translate it right?—"Between us and heaven or hell there is only this life, which is the frailest thing in the world?"

BENTLEY. Pascal. Your translation's accurate.

LOIS. But I thought you said the other day you didn't believe in heaven or hell.

BENTLEY. Not outside us; inside us. I've dropped all the church stuff.

LOIS. What about the Romans?

BENTLEY. How did you guess I'd had anything to do with them? They're gone too—Romans as well—can't swallow Transubstantiation, the Virgin Birth, and all that stuff—though they do at least understand a man and what having a soul is. Their priesthood is a lofty craft—something the Anglicans, with their shamefacedness and their compromise, will never master.

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LOIS. I see. [*She points. OSWALD seats himself in the big armchair.*] Oswald, something is trying me rather hard just now. Submission is hard. I'm not trying to pry out your secrets—I know you're unhappy—but why did you mark that passage and what d'you think Pascal really meant?

BENTLEY. I can tell you what I think it means to us. We have only this life, and while it lasts we can make for ourselves a state of heaven or hell within our souls. Have you ever considered what "only this life" means?

LOIS. Yes; a drop into the gulf the other end.

BENTLEY. You understand . . . Oh, Lois . . .
[*He covers his eyes with his hand.*]

LOIS [*looking up*]. But, Oswald, you should be happy. You're real. You *do* try for things.

BENTLEY. I don't really try. I only see clearly enough to know my life's a sham.

LOIS [*pained*]. Oswald!

BENTLEY. There's a sort of division in me. I hope for nothing; I desire nothing; only sometimes I feel as if something were lacking and that I shall die if I don't get it, but I cannot tell what.

LOIS [*slowly, in a reverie*]. I know very well what I want. But I am not sure we have a right to happiness. God may wish otherwise for our good.

BENTLEY. You believe in God?

LOIS [*quietly*]. Yes.

BENTLEY [*more quietly still*]. So do I.

LOIS [*hugging her knees, closing her eyes, tilting back her head*]. The Somebody who made the universe, the Somebody who knew it was better

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to shed his only life apparently vainly for others on a cross than to live selfishly, the Somebody we feel in ourselves—my Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

BENTLEY. Bless you, Lois. I am not so lucky or so good. [*Change of tone, with difficult precision.*] Imagine a familiar, dreary landscape with a lake in the middle of it on a still raw January day when all is frozen and the sun hidden in a biting mist . . . that is my life, everything in it is quite frostbound, dead and stale. Nothing new can happen: overhead the sun—that is, God, known to be present but quite invisible, careless and remote. Down below the lake—call it my soul—frozen hard, scarcely reflecting God even if He appears—only just lying there dull and aching . . . Lois, there are times when I would give the world to be able to cry . . .

LOIS. I understand.

BENTLEY. I make plans to get right. I feel a need to make some sacrifice—to break up this hardness in me. I look back and I can't be sure I ever spent one day as it should be spent.

[*The telephone rings.*]

BENTLEY. Damn. I'll go—business probably. I haven't been near it lately. [*At telephone.*] Hello. Hello. Ah, Rupert. [*Lois stands up. BENTLEY turns round so that he can see LOIS. Pause.*] Hold on to them? No? See me? Very well . . . Yes, she's in. Certainly. [*He cuts off and comes slowly back to his seat. As he sits down he says.*] Rupert's coming up. He should be here

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in a few minutes. He was asking after you.

LOIS. Was he? [*She sits down. She is silent. Reviving.*] There was at least one day well spent when you married Clara.

BENTLEY [*change of tone*]. I suppose so.

[*He smiles weakly at her. She draws the footstool over to him and seats herself with her head against the arm of his chair.*]

LOIS [*very seriously*]. Don't pretend you doubt.

BENTLEY [*bluntly*]. I do.

LOIS [*revolted*]. What! She thinks of nothing but you.

[*He makes a motion as if of pain.*]

BENTLEY [*musings*]. That's it. I'm an obsession with her. And yet she doesn't know me.

LOIS. But you must love her, Oswald.

BENTLEY [*looking up*]. What . . .! oh, of course I do.

LOIS [*taking his arm*]. Treat me seriously, Oswald, or we fall apart, and I've no one but you.

BENTLEY [*bluntly*]. Rupert.

LOIS [*putting her hands over her cheeks, beseechingly*]. Don't . . . yet it's true: his love is what I want.

BENTLEY. You mustn't mind me, Lois, my darling. [*He draws her into his arms and kisses her on the forehead.*] I hope you'll—

LOIS. When you—just now—I wish I didn't feel quite so much what I do feel about Rupert, for it means that I shall have to give up perhaps feeling quite so much what I do feel about you.

GUILTY SOULS

BENTLEY [*smiling gently*]. That sounds very complicated. About Rupert——

LOIS [*shaking her head desperately*]. Don't you see? He doesn't know. And on his side—oh well, I suppose he likes me.

BENTLEY. "Likes"?

LOIS [*with sudden impatience*]. Yes; it can be a cruel word sometimes, can't it?

BENTLEY. Has he given no word, no sign?

[LOIS *shakes her head slowly and turns away*.

BENTLEY [*very softly*]. Lois, dear [*looking up at her*] I think you're looking very pretty to-night.

LOIS [*bending down*]. It is nice of you, and very much like you, to say that. But I shall have to take what comes. If he says something I'm his for ever and ever, and if he doesn't [*sighing*] it's just the same. [BENTLEY *bows his head*. LOIS *sits down by him again*.] Unhappy still?

BENTLEY. I was wondering if I could have given the idea of Clara up. It might have been better.

LOIS. Better?

BENTLEY. Better for her. Say Rupert proposed and you accepted, could you give him up if it were better for him?

LOIS. Don't ask me—I—it isn't anything serious, is it?

BENTLEY [*genuinely*]. I was only thinking that in many ways you are stronger than I.

LOIS [*abruptly*]. Yes; if it was for him, I could. There's something in me that wouldn't be

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afraid to die for him—and that would be a form of dying. It's not virtue in me or just my being in love with him, it's the way I was born.

BENTLEY. You're so true, but I—I vacillate.
[*He sighs.*]

LOIS. Still unhappy?—What is it? Is it this God affair?

BENTLEY. I suppose so. It's as if I'd dropped out of God's sight and now suffered a sort of paralysis which prevented me calling His attention to me, and in any case I have no right. It isn't worth His while. I'm nothing.

LOIS. It isn't what we are, but what we *do* that cuts us off. Or not doing something. Not, so to speak, facing square. Being unwilling to give up . . . sometimes I think, though, God lets us do these things, lets us despair, that we may fall into His arms. It's not for nothing they are stretched out like that upon the cross: maybe it is to receive us at the last. If you cannot tell me, tell Him.

BENTLEY [*sighing deeply*]. There is nothing to tell.

LOIS. "A broken and contrite spirit Thou shalt not despise"—isn't that beautiful? And it's true.

BENTLEY [*low*]. Yes. [*A long pause.*] I must talk with Clara. [*Rousing.*] Rupert will be coming. If I were you I should go and meet him down the drive. Put on a coat.

LOIS. You think I might?

[*LOIS goes out to the right for her coat.*]

BENTLEY *goes over to the crucifix and*

GUILTY SOULS

looks quietly at it. LOIS comes back with a coat on, the collar turned up but open at the throat.

LOIS [*coming up to him*]. We've had a good talk, haven't we? [*He nods and kisses her hands. She shakes her head at him.*] Please, no; I'd rather you didn't.

BENTLEY. Rupert?

LOIS. No, only it spoils it. And if there's anything I can do——

[He nods mournfully. She goes on toward the conservatory doors. She opens one. He steals up behind her.]

BENTLEY. Don't let my unhappiness interfere with your happiness.

LOIS. I'm going to torture.

BENTLEY. With joy in your eyes.

LOIS. Oswald, you understand everything!

BENTLEY. But somehow I think it's not going to be torture this time.

LOIS. Oh, Oswald, do you mean it?

BENTLEY. I don't know, but his way of asking about you on the telephone . . . There. Go to him.

LOIS. Now I know why you wanted to kiss my hands. If you had only said! So now—it may be for the last time——

[She presses back the collar of her coat and lifts her head. CLARA comes with a vase of flowers in her hands. She sees BENTLEY bend over and kiss LOIS on the lips and she stifles a cry.]

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BENTLEY [*much moved*]. Now go. [*She disappears. BENTLEY turns round, not perturbed.*] Hello, Clara.

CLARA. I've brought you some flowers from the drawing-room. [*She moves across the room and says gently, hiding her pain.*] I shouldn't kiss Lois any more. She's grown up now, you know.

BENTLEY. I shan't.

CLARA. That's right. Where shall I put them? Here?

[*She deposits the flowers by the crucifix.*]

BENTLEY [*a little sharply*]. No, there by the telephone. [*She goes to the revolving bookcase.*] I've something to say to you. [CLARA starts.]

CLARA [*arranging the flowers*]. I nearly upset them. Is it very long? Shall we sit down?

[*She sits down at his desk. BENTLEY, during the ensuing scene perambulates between the conservatory doors and the fireplace.*]

BENTLEY. You must let me have my say. I was happy once . . . is it possible? I don't understand the man I was and the man I am now.

CLARA. What is it troubles you? You seem to me what priggish people call a "very upright man," and I am pleased and proud of it.

BENTLEY. I am all sin and yet I have no special sin.

CLARA [*interrupting*]. I think I saw the hatch move.

BENTLEY [*giving a glance*]. No, it's down——
[*Continuing.*] What am I? A successful business

man: a perfectly respectable speculator. I am said to be honest—as if any business were honest! I was on the bench. [*He laughs mirthlessly.*]

CLARA. You are better educated than others, and better acquainted with the world: those are good qualifications.

BENTLEY. But they give me no right to judge others. It is madness to think they do. Once I belonged to myself—I seemed to myself a reasonable being, so reasonable that I never questioned my right to live as I did. I was affable with some people, I took it on myself to be distant with others. I was a man of affairs, and those affairs seemed important and reasonable, and such as a man like myself did well to be engaged upon. Reasonable! Reasonable! That is the word can most drive one mad. As a solicitor I busied myself with other people's affairs and got my living that way. I never saw that my own affairs, the thing, the crying emptiness, the voice in the desert of my own soul was the only affair that counted, and that being busy getting my living—an over-comfortable living—was merely a way of dying.

CLARA. But one must live.

BENTLEY. I was beginning to discover this emptiness when we two met. And at the first glance you entered into my soul as if you had the key. And I never questioned—no woman had ever been anything but a moment of innocent amusement or an hour of disgust, and I said, "Here is all you need."

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CLARA. And am I not still? Say I am, for you are all I need or ever shall need.

[She approaches him, but he does not stop in his walk.]

BENTLEY *[troubled]*. Don't ask me. I don't know. I daren't inquire. You are happier than I: that is all I know.

[He approaches her again in his walk.]

CLARA *[in pain]*. Is that all? Look at me, take me in your arms, kiss me.

[She essays to put her arms round his neck.]

BENTLEY. Don't. Don't. I can't bear you to touch me. I am nothing.

CLARA *[chilled]*. Very well. As you like.

BENTLEY *[morose]*. I've hurt you. I see. I'm sorry. I tell you I've discovered I'm nothing. To wear these clothes . . . talk as I do . . . be respected . . . that isn't what I want.

CLARA. Is it tenderness? . . . I've given you what I could. Is it that we have no children? Before we were poor and I perhaps was selfish, and now . . . *[She shrugs sadly]* you might lose me.

BENTLEY. Ah, don't. You and Lois. I've had so much and I'm not worthy. Everybody has been so good. I am unworthy of you.

[His eyes fill with tears. He grasps her hand convulsively and makes as if to kiss it.]

CLARA. Don't, don't. This is hideous. It is unworthy of you to think of yourself as unworthy.

BENTLEY. Clara, I have lost my religion.

CLARA [*with the faintest shadow of irony*]. Yes? Does it hurt very much?

BENTLEY. It began long ago. A year before the smash in the solicitor's office. Eight years ago now. I began to feel restless and unsatisfied. These periods alternated with a sort of satisfaction of exhaustion when I neither hoped nor feared and, looking at the trees, I felt I would like to be like them and take no care till I died. Sometimes I feel that now.

CLARA. But if nothing matters or means anything, why not rest and be content?

BENTLEY. There must be a more positive peace than that. And the unsatisfaction always returned each time in a more terrible form—I longed to drink, to run after lewd women: anything to get away from my inward emptiness. I flung myself into my work and tried to drug myself with routine. Unsatisfaction is the source of all man's unhappiness.

CLARA. But in the end it brought you here.

BENTLEY. What is *here*?

CLARA [*patiently*]. It is your home which I have tried to make as you would have it.

BENTLEY. There is no home save where God is.

CLARA [*in pain*]. We have done our best.

BENTLEY. I know. But this [*waving his hand*] lies outside the matter: temporal things—I desire eternal.

CLARA [*still patient*]. I know I'm not very quick at religious things—they don't seem to me

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to move according to any plan I know of. But perhaps if you tell me *exactly*—the facts, rather than the emotions—I shall understand. I don't see why being a business man should make you unhappy. [*With faint reproach.*] And your state of unhappiness makes others unhappy, you know. Aren't you perhaps thinking a little too much about self?

BENTLEY. Oh, if you could see!—I am striving to destroy all that is myself. I am a better man than I was, but it only makes me more unhappy. [*Musing.*] After Vyson's fall I was very busy and I had an aversion for things of the spirit. How happy I was then! Vyson was safe, shut up, I should see him no more.

CLARA. But it wasn't your fault.

BENTLEY. His face and his eyes got on my nerves at the trial. [*Pause.*] Then no sooner was he out than he met his end.

CLARA. I know.

BENTLEY. I had tried to do him good. And that's what it turned to.

CLARA. But how were you concerned? Vyson was a mere neurasthenic.

BENTLEY. Still, he was a man. When he came out I sent him, anonymously, a ticket for Brazil and one hundred and forty pounds.

CLARA. A hundred and forty?

BENTLEY [*coldly*]. He had been my partner [*walking away*]*—*and yet Vyson is nothing to do with my trouble.

CLARA. A fine partner!

GUILTY SOULS

BENTLEY. But to perish so miserably!

CLARA. I remember your telling me he was dead. Was it suicide?

BENTLEY [*shuddering*]. D'you think he would have—— Had I brought him to that?

CLARA. You?

BENTLEY. We—the Court, the law, and my evidence—for I feel persuaded it was my evidence finished him.

CLARA. He only got his deserts. Society must be protected.

BENTLEY. Society is not protected.

CLARA. What?

BENTLEY. I mean that sort of thing doesn't protect it.

CLARA. He brought it on himself.

BENTLEY. We all do that, but some suffer more than is just.

CLARA. I daresay that, anyway, underneath he wasn't really so sensitive—easily-affected people are often like that.

BENTLEY [*with hidden irony*]. Are they?

CLARA. Histrionics. Easy affectability isn't necessarily depth.

BENTLEY. It doesn't necessarily exclude it. Now, I——

CLARA. If you'd done a thing like that! You couldn't do a thing like that, and, anyhow, if you did, you'd soon live it down: a strong man endures the penalties; they make him proud.

BENTLEY. Only if he persuades himself he isn't guilty.

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CLARA. I think I should admire a man able to do that.

BENTLEY. But the man would be a liar.

CLARA. After all, society is predatory.

BENTLEY. You said "Society must be protected."

CLARA. Yes, play to the rules or don't get caught breaking them: though it's true we don't all agree on those rules. There is, however, a general standard which requires that the predatory instinct should not endanger society as a whole. But "Women" [*laughing*] some philosopher once said, "are all, at heart, anarchists." I can quite believe it. We prefer the convention to the spirit—it's more reliable. [*She is amused.*]

BENTLEY [*without a smile*]. Society need not be predatory.

CLARA. Make your complaint to Nature.

BENTLEY. Rape is Nature, but we've overcome it.

CLARA. Don't . . .!

BENTLEY. Society need not be predatory. Establish a commonwealth of things human after the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Abolish profit.

CLARA. But what becomes of progress without the individual's reward?

BENTLEY [*more serious than ever*]. A vicious circle. [*Sadly.*] Thieve to have means—what for? To have more means to thieve.

CLARA. But possessions——

BENTLEY. All earthly possessions are vain.

GUILTY SOULS

Every religion begins with that. There is no progress but in the heart of man.

CLARA. *Do* be practical. Who is to begin it?

BENTLEY [*coming up to her, loudly*]. I am!

[CLARA rises.

CLARA [*staring at him*]. You? You? You're exalté!

BENTLEY [*quietly*]. Someone must begin it. Why not I?

CLARA. You're mad.

BENTLEY. I feared you would say that. This is what I had determined to tell you. It has come out sooner than I expected. I'm materially rich and spiritually bankrupt. When I have given up what I have gained one way and another God may accept me—naked, a prodigal son——

[CLARA recoils. *The trap opens with a bang; then the odd man, a lame, bent fellow, clean shaven, with red hair, emerges from the pantry door carrying a tray, which he places on the sideboard.*

CLARA [*recovering*]. You needn't lay the table yet, Bryant. Dinner will be an hour later. I'll tell Miss Lois myself.

[BRYANT goes out by the stairs door.

CLARA [*gently*]. Tell me now how you arrived at such a position. [*She sits down again.*

BENTLEY. Vyson was drowned.

CLARA. On his way to Brazil?

BENTLEY. Yes, in the *Gigantic*.

CLARA. The *Gigantic*!—the one——

BENTLEY. Yes. He must have been below,

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since his body, with that of so many others, was never recovered. [*Strangely.*] I think I see him in that little white box of a cabin. He went second and alone. I wished him to travel in comfort . . . So in the small hours Vyson lies there awake. A feeble light. And Vyson is thinking "I'm out of my trouble. It's behind me. I'm free. The bitterness is over—past. There's a new life before me now. I shall never be in the web again." And the very memory of the Court, of the faces of all the actors in that drama, including my own, begin to fade before the prospect of the future. We become as nothing to him. He laughs at us. We cannot touch him any more. [*The door has opened very slowly and BRYANT enters, carrying a leather post-bag.*] He has passed from our world. He is free as a ghost.

[BRYANT stands still staring at BENTLEY, who is looking straight before him.]

CLARA [*without turning her head*]. There are no more letters, Bryant.

[BRYANT bows and withdraws into the pantry.]

BENTLEY. And suddenly as Vyson lies there full of subdued happiness and hope it happens: there is a crash; the roar of engines reversed; in a moment darkness falls and he finds himself imprisoned. It will be three hours before all is over. [*Whispering.*] So long she took to go down. [*Pause.*] And he just thinking he was safe at last.

CLARA. She hit a derelict, didn't she? [BENTLEY nods.] Be reasonable: a derelict is an act of God.

GUILTY SOULS

BENTLEY [*passionately*]. An act of the devil! It has destroyed me. [*Uneasily.*] I can feel him standing in the darkness while the warm tropic water deepens round his feet. [*Crescendo.*] A few minutes since he was safe. Now in a few minutes he will die—and I, I am responsible!

[*He gestures.*]

CLARA. It was fate.

BENTLEY. Fate! Fate! But there must be justice in God. I am living: he is dead. Dead! [*He gets up and walks the room.*] Here am I—Joe is dead, Sir Hector is dead, Vyson is dead: the responsibilities of their souls trouble them no more. Death!—we dare not consider it. We say “So-and-so is dead,” and we avert our eyes from a thing that happens every day . . . But when Vyson died I could not avert my eyes. The incalculableness of death’s choice fascinated me. For if death is so unfair to the ill-used, what shall he do to the fortunate? [*He stops in his walk.*] Clara, I saw a motto on a calendar once. I kept it. [*He hurries to his desk, pulls out a drawer, and extracts a card.*] Read.

CLARA [*reading automatically*]. “Two things there are at which it is not wise to gaze too long: death and the sun.” Yes. That’s Rochefoucauld, I think.

[*She puts the card down. BENTLEY sits down.*]

BENTLEY. What must the Frenchman have suffered to know that! When Vyson was drowned I felt in some strange way that this was a challenge. I too must share that gazing. His death

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was the work of a higher power which thwarted the atonement of myself and society. What did it mean? What *was* death? I shut myself up, pretending a headache, and faced the thought of death. I sat down, took a long breath and, as it were, plunged. In five minutes I had a sense of death like a revelation. [*He rises, and stands shivering. Then abruptly sits down again. With quiet but extreme intensity.*] It is as if one found oneself on a sort of diving-board jutting into pure void. Above and below and around there is nothing but black space—something that goes on and that has no ceiling and no walls and no floor, and which you cannot understand. At first your heart pants and you tremble so much you fear to fall off the plank. Then that goes and nothing remains but a feeling of oppression: your head throbs, you cling on all fours to the plank, unable to stir a limb. And then, all at once, you notice something—THE PLANK IS BEING STEALTHILY WITHDRAWN FROM UNDER YOU. You can see that the end of the plank is approaching. Some time the end will be drawn from under *you*. And as you lie along the plank such a nausea comes over you that you want to vomit. No nightmare can compare with this, for in a nightmare you know that it will end. BUT YOU KNOW THAT, WHEN YOU WAKE UP FROM THIS, YOU WILL STILL BE ON THE PLANK. [*Awfully.*] WE ARE ON IT NOW. [*Gesturing with a sweep over and across the fender.*] We, all of us, are on it now. [*He rises.*] Realize that, and you will know the vertigo of the abyss.

GUILTY SOULS

CLARA. Don't take that accusative tone. It is wisest to refuse to face some things. I should begin to go mad if I didn't.

BENTLEY. No, you would begin where all must end—on your knees. Nothing matters but God—nothing! nothing! To the bottom of my soul I know that. Let us kneel down here and now.

[*He stretches out his hand.*

CLARA [*standing up. She sees this is the battle, and is determined to win once and for all*]. No, no, I'd rather go mad than that. You have said nothing matters but God. Are love and service nothing? Human relationships nothing? Honesty nothing? All I have lived for? All insignificant? Answer. Do you feel that? [BENTLEY *lowers his head. Lower tone.*] I remember when I first knew you, though you were mainly an honest Churchman, yet you had one blind spot: you were dogged by this unhealthy idea of a God who haunts man like a malignant phantom. But I loved you, and I believed that you loved me. Under the sunlight I tried to shed on you that phantom seemed to dissolve. I said to myself, "He is healed. The phantom is dead."

BENTLEY [*sullenly*]. God does not die.

CLARA. No, it seems He lives to torment us.

BENTLEY. No, we torment ourselves because we remember that we do not serve Him. He is merciful. He reminds us in time.

CLARA. I love you, and you know that I love you. I ask you to remember that and, oh, if you

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have any mercy, as you say your God has mercy, try to understand my need of you!

BENTLEY [*looking down*]. That is my burden, for His need is greater.

CLARA [*losing all control—passionately*]. Oh, your God is cruel and makes you cruel! [*Growing frantic.*] Look at me—I am only a woman. I feel the terrors as much or more than you, but let your cruel, jealous, bullying, Jewish-Christian God—if there could be such a Being—or infamous Fate bowl me over, I will not submit. Broken as I am, I will not slobber over His iron feet. I've some pride left, and I say that the human spirit is fairer than such a God. If God mocks man, let man repay Him with one glance of scorn, and of that glance let that cruel God die, for if He lives He deserves no more of all women, who have known the dignity of loving and being loved would deal Him—what I deal Him now [*all but in tears of mortification and grief*], my curse!

BENTLEY. Clara! Clara! You don't know what you're saying.

CLARA. I do. [*Pulling herself together.*] I've loved you. I have borne with you because I loved you. I have tried to make my love for you like my notion of any possible God—a fountain of frankness and sunlight. I know I am proud. My pride has kept me honest in my love toward you. And now—what's happened? All that I respected seems gone—there's no dignity or constancy in you. You have contracted a sort of spiritual

disease, a vice of the soul, and you will ruin yourself.

BENTLEY. But it is all that is best in me makes me so aspire.

CLARA. I know you better than that. It is all that is feeblest.

BENTLEY. No, no, it is my strength that desires God. [*In anguish.*] My heart cries out to Him. When it calls He lives and I live in Him, and when, through sin or emptiness, it will not or cannot cry, then He no longer exists and I die. [*Quietly.*] Clara, believe me. I perish for the love of God.

CLARA. Tell that to a woman who does not love you!

[*She sweeps towards the door and opens it. At the door she turns about, smiling, triumphant, with her arms open to receive the penitent. But her expression changes to one of horror, for she perceives that BENTLEY has crossed the room and fallen on his knees before the crucifix. Completely vanquished, she rushes out and pulls the door to after her. BRYANT looks in, but retires as BENTLEY rises from his knees. Without a sound, without a gesture, save of placing his hands over his ears as if to shut out what he has just heard, BENTLEY goes out through the conservatory. BRYANT reappears, bearing a photograph with him, and makes for the little table. He lifts*

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up the portrait of RUPERT and makes as if to substitute the second portrait for the first. Then, as if doubtful of the propriety of this, he looks at the crucifix and then at the door by which BENTLEY has vanished, and finally replaces RUPERT'S portrait exactly where it stood before. As he does so, having his back to the room, MRS. BENTLEY steals in.

CLARA. Forgive me—[*she sees who it is and stifles her sentence.*] Bryant, we will not wait the full hour: we will have dinner directly Miss Lois comes in. Sound the gong for me, I shall be in my room.

[*She goes out.* BRYANT consults his watch and hurries toward the pantry, taking the photograph he had brought in with him. The room is very dim. Behind the conservatory lingers a faint twilight. As BRYANT reaches his door RUPERT'S voice is heard saying, "You nearly made me trip on the steps, Lois." BRYANT, in the shadow of the corner, stops to listen.

LOIS [*in the conservatory*]. Must we go back so soon into life again?

RUPERT. This concerns others as well as ourselves. [*Laughing half dolefully.*] The world goes on even though we are engaged.

LOIS. I feel as if I'd never eat or sleep or do ordinary things again. It's as if I were stepping on air. I'm so happy in the darkness. How shall I speak to you in the light? Hold my arm, Rupert.

GUILTY SOULS

RUPERT. Once more.

[BRYANT *leans forward. The silhouettes of LOIS and RUPERT, scarcely distinguishable among the foliage, merge into one. BRYANT clutches himself and goes into the pantry.*

LOIS. Perhaps we'd best go in. I'm shivering so. [The two come in.

RUPERT. Hello! any one at home? [No answer.

LOIS. Oswald. Oswald.

[She puts her hands over her face.

RUPERT [awkwardly]. I thought I saw somebody on the lawn—when we were under the cedar. Perhaps he's gone out.

LOIS. Do go and find him—just for a moment: my heart's beating so, I feel so shaken.

RUPERT. Take your hands away. [He looks into her face.] It's all right, isn't it?

LOIS [smiling constrainedly]. Yes.

[He presses her hands to his mouth. They smile feebly at each other.

RUPERT. And we'll tell Clara and Oswald of our engagement at once?

LOIS. I suppose so. I suppose we should. But when happiness comes I feel so loath to tell for fear it should evaporate. And to-night, with the biggest of all, I have a feeling of its slipping away from me, of its being so good that it could never possibly last. As if something threatened it.

RUPERT. Nonsense, Lois. Nothing threatens it. [Quieter.] That's good. Go and tell Clara.

LOIS. Very well.

ACT TWO

[RUPERT gently blows a kiss to her, and they go out—she by the door to the stairs, he by the conservatory. BRYANT softly opens the pantry door and comes into the middle of the room. For a moment he stands as if fuming with rage, next quietly and quickly goes to the photograph frame, pulls out the portrait, and replaces it by one he carries. The portrait of RUPERT he tears into shreds and casts into the waste-paper basket. A step is heard in the conservatory. BRYANT glides back into the pantry. RUPERT re-enters, wanders to and looks through the door to the right in a hesitating manner. His back is turned to the pantry door. BRYANT comes silently in, and, seeing RUPERT, makes as if to go and remove the photograph, but recoils on seeing RUPERT about to turn. BRYANT retreats into the pantry. RUPERT switches on the light and strolls to the little table in search of a cigarette. As he stoops for the box he starts, seeing the portrait. Then he lifts it in both hands. LOIS enters.]

LOIS. Where's Oswald?

RUPERT [*swinging round*]. I couldn't find him. I say [*holding up the frame*]——!

LOIS. Clara wouldn't see me.

RUPERT. Eh?

LOIS. She seems terribly upset. I could hear

her crying through the door. I never heard her cry before. I didn't tell her our secret. She says will we go into the drawing-room. She'll be down in a few minutes. [*Coming up to him, laughing.*] Proud of yourself in your new frame?

RUPERT [*gravely, offering her the frame*]. Do I look like that?

LOIS. But—what! . . . Who is it?

RUPERT. Vyson.

LOIS. Vyson? Vyson?

RUPERT. My predecessor in partnership—when Oswald was a solicitor, not oil speculator.

LOIS. Vyson? . . . Why, so it is: I'd forgotten him.

RUPERT. See what it's got written on it: "Condemn not, and thou shalt not be condemned." Oswald must be mad. [*Lois takes it.*]

LOIS. Who put it there?

RUPERT. It must be Oswald—who else could it be? Fancy having it in his study! Since Vyson's death Oswald won't let his name be mentioned. But I'm certain he often thinks about him.

LOIS. I'm sorry he ever lived, if his memory is going to upset Oswald.

RUPERT. Shall I put it away?

LOIS. No; that might upset him more. He's in a terrible state just now.

RUPERT. Tell Clara?

LOIS. No. Let's hope he'll put it away before she sees it, if she hasn't seen it.

[*RUPERT replaces the photograph, with its back toward the room.*]

ACT TWO

RUPERT [*rising*]. It must be close on dinner. Let's go to the drawing-room and wait for Clara.

[*They go out together.* BRYANT appears with a tray and begins rapidly laying the table. BENTLEY comes in: his face is composed, but full of gloom.

BENTLEY [*smiling wearily, as he fingers his hair*]. The dew that falls upon the just and upon the unjust. [*Glancing at BRYANT's tray.*] Dinner? [*He looks at his hands as if considering washing them, and goes out by the door to the right.* BRYANT comes forward and twists the photograph so that it faces the room. BENTLEY returns, rubbing his fingers together. He begins to pace up and down, looking at the floor. BRYANT, finishing laying the table, covertly watches BENTLEY as at the end of the turn BENTLEY each time draws nearer the little table. At last BENTLEY stops as if he suddenly beheld at his feet an abyss in the floor. He all but cries out; then, taking up the portrait in shaking hands, he reads aloud the first two words—"Condemn not . . ." He glances fearfully over his left shoulder and then over his right, and, seeing BRYANT, replaces the portrait. Then he stands up and says, controlling his voice as best he may.] Bryant, do you know anything of this? [BRYANT comes up on his right.] How did it come here? [BRYANT lifts the picture. Silence. With a hissing sound.] Answer.

BRYANT [*holding up the picture before BENT-*

GUILTY SOULS

LEY]. Look on that face and [*indicating his own*] on this. Look at the eyes.

BENTLEY. I——[*Loudly*] Vyson! [*Frightfully agitated.*] No, no. Impossible: he's dead. [*Staring at BRYANT and making a little gesture with his hand.*] Begone.

BRYANT [*slowly*]. Vyson is dead.

BENTLEY. What! . . . Vyson . . . Bryant?

BRYANT. Vyson is dead. Bryant does not exist. [*Exalted.*] I am your Conscience and I do not leave you till you either die or confess.

BENTLEY [*weakly*]. Help!

[*BRYANT hushes him with one glance toward the doors, one motion of the hand.*]

BENTLEY [*faltering*]. My conscience?

BRYANT [*firmly*]. The Voice of God.

[*BRYANT slides the picture face downwards on the table. Then he glides to the gong and fiercely but coolly strikes it a hollow blow. As the note dies away the door opens and CLARA, followed by LOIS and RUPERT, comes in.*]

CLARA [*outside the door*]. It'll do him good. It'll make him forget. [*Entering.*] Shall I tell him? [*Calling.*] These two dear things [*Pause.*] Oswald!

LOIS [*to BENTLEY*]. The torture is over. Rupert and I——

[*The words die out, for BENTLEY has turned slowly round and they have all seen his face. They sit down, almost terrified, in silence. BRYANT gently in-*]

ACT TWO

icates that dinner is served. BENTLEY goes over to the table. As he passes BRYANT he shrinks and turns away his head. BRYANT sets his chair. BENTLEY sits down and, gathering his elbows together on the table like a haunted man, sets his closed fists against his teeth.

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT THREE



ACT THREE

The same room. Three days later. Early evening. CLARA discovered pulling out the drawers in BENTLEY'S desk. RUPERT enters through the conservatory.

RUPERT. Ah, Clara! Where's Lois?

CLARA. How is he?

RUPERT. Whom?

CLARA. Oswald.

RUPERT. What! isn't he here?

CLARA. Don't you know where he is?

RUPERT. No. I just ran in to see Lois. I thought she might be with Oswald.

CLARA. She's not in.

RUPERT. Damnation. I haven't seen her for three days, not since that evening.

CLARA. And Oswald—isn't he at the office?

RUPERT. Oh, he's been. Been and gone. I daresay they're out together. Then he'll be all right. *[She winces.]*

CLARA *[low]*. D'you know what I was looking for when you came in?

RUPERT *[glancing round at the little table]*. Vyson's portrait?

CLARA. I don't follow you——

RUPERT. Didn't you see it? It was here right on this table on that awful night. No? Then he must have put it away.

CLARA. So that's why he locked this drawer. I feared it was something else.

RUPERT *[softly, awed]*. What?

CLARA. Ammunition.

RUPERT. Ammunition!

CLARA. I never will let him keep ammunition in the house. A revolver's such a dangerous thing at any time. And just now—you follow me?

RUPERT. You surely can't mean he might——
[*She nods, distraught.*]

RUPERT. No, Clara, it's not possible. He's not that type.

CLARA [*very low*]. Anything's possible. [*Louder.*] He's quite mad.

RUPERT. You mean he——?

CLARA. Listen. After dinner on Wednesday, when you'd gone, he made us come and sit with him. He said he was afraid to be alone; said his nerve was gone through business.

RUPERT. After-strain, perhaps. We've both worked very hard these last few years. He especially. He paid back all Vyson stole. But the struggle's told on him, and I tell you he showed a nerve! Well, that sort of thing can't go on for ever. He should see a doctor.

CLARA. Rupert, it was awful. For two whole hours he sat in that chair and trembled—just like a rabbit that hears the stoat behind it. At last I took him to bed. [*Looking away.*] I was as tender to him as possible. In the small hours he got up and went out. Since then, whenever he's been in he's more or less barricaded himself in here. [*Looking at him again.*] At intervals he calls for us, and we go and sit with him. He says he's going to give his money away—every penny.

RUPERT. What!

CLARA. He persists in that.

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RUPERT. Does he?—indeed! Of course, he's quite capable of carrying any idea through once he gets it into his head. That last oil coup . . . Well, I wonder. It certainly looks serious. He came down on Wednesday morning "to go through his papers"—so he said. But when I went in to see him he was sitting still as a stone, only every now and then his fingers were tracing in the air like this—

[RUPERT traces a cross in the air with his first and second fingers joined together as a priest does when blessing.]

CLARA. The sign of the cross. Oh, I hate the cross! Look at that [*she points to the crucifix*], it obsesses him. His old robust self seems quite gone. In the middle of my talking to him he'll go and devour that thing with his eyes.

RUPERT. How?

CLARA. Sometimes as if in prayer, more often in a silent fury.

RUPERT. Why don't you move it?

CLARA. I daren't.

RUPERT. Choose some pretext at a moment when he's angry with it. Perhaps if you succeed he may calm down. We don't want to call in a doctor before it's absolutely necessary. Let's give him one day more—meanwhile keep a close observation on him. Never leave him.

CLARA. How can I spy on him? It isn't honest. I daren't now, too, of all times, just when he has become so suspicious of me.

RUPERT. Lois, then?

GUILTY SOULS

CLARA [*shortly*]. No.

RUPERT. Why not?

CLARA. Aren't you engaged to Lois?

RUPERT. What of it?—Clara, what d'you mean?

CLARA. Don't look at me, Rupert. I feel ashamed to say it. I—no, I can't say it. I'm a proud woman.

RUPERT [*coming up to her*]. You must.

CLARA [*whispering piteously*]. I'm jealous of Lois. [*Louder.*] She—she—she's got everything on her side—and—that I should have to say it!—perhaps she understands him better than I——

RUPERT. Well?

CLARA. She's younger—I can't help seeing she's beautiful. She's better-looking now than I——

RUPERT. Of course, as her fiancé——

CLARA [*stamping*]. Don't be specious. She is beautiful—and I, I'm getting old—I'm going off—ah, to think it! Just when I need every advantage I can have to keep him.

RUPERT [*coldly and uneasily*]. But, Clara, I don't understand you. Lois is engaged to me. [*Their eyes meet.*] Come, you know her character.

CLARA. Yes. Has it struck you that what is considered best in her may impel her to the worst? She is very sorry for him.

RUPERT. Of course she is. I'm glad she is, and I trust her. I admire her sympathy for him.

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CLARA [*distantly*]. I wonder how much you know of Lois or of any other young girl.

RUPERT [*slowly and distinctly*]. That's unworthy of you, Clara.

CLARA [*returning to him, gently*]. No; listen. You are young: that is, you are probably so busy enjoying the emotions of love in yourself that you have hardly time to notice what is happening in your partner. Oh, I know, I have been young too. The daily spectacle of his intellectual, moral, and, yes, even his physical strength cannot have been without its effect on her. Now, when his mind is almost deranged, his moral strength shaken, as it appears to be, his very physical strength itself at the stretch——

RUPERT. But Lois knows me, and loves me too.

CLARA [*with wistful irony*]. Young men are very ready to take the love of young women for granted.

RUPERT. I'm sure she's true.

CLARA. I'm sure she is. [*She smiles brilliantly.*]

RUPERT. Somebody ought to keep an eye on him. Especially if he has bought—what you say you fear he has bought [*he nods toward the drawer*]*—but I daresay it's only the portrait in there.*

CLARA. We shall have to trust to Bryant.

RUPERT. Bryant's noticed?

CLARA. Yes, I caught him watching Oswald yesterday through that [*she indicates the trap*], but he explained afterwards that he thought he'd

seen Oswald playing with the thing he keeps in there [*nodding at the drawer*]. It was good of him to tell me.

RUPERT. Bryant'll have to do. Well, I must be going. Got to change before I go out to dinner at the Bassetts'. [*He goes to conservatory window.*] Hello, Oswald's on the lawn. Shall I go out and speak to him?

CLARA. Perhaps you'd best not. Come back in half an hour or so on your way out to dinner.

RUPERT. He must have seen my two-seater in the drive.

CLARA. I'll say you came to see Lois and are in a hurry. [*RUPERT goes out. CLARA pats her hair. BENTLEY looms up. CLARA turns and stands looking at the crucifix. BENTLEY peers through the glass as if watching for somebody. Then he comes in. He is very moody. CLARA turns.*] Well, Oswald, had a nice walk? Where's Lois?

BENTLEY [*abstractedly*]. Lois? I don't know. I thought I saw her in the distance once: just before Paul spoke to me again. [*CLARA starts. BENTLEY's walk up and down the room quickens; he scowls.*] Clara!

CLARA [*startled at his tone*]. Yes?

BENTLEY. Come here. [*He takes her by the wrists.*] Now swear, swear that you'll tell me the truth!

CLARA [*calmly*]. I swear.

BENTLEY. I have seen you read books on physical research. [*Intensely*]. Do you know of any recorded case of the dead having power over

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the living, power in the sense of dominion, frightful dominion?

CLARA. No, Oswald, I do not.

BENTLEY [*almost flinging her away*]. Then He is torturing me. [*He rushes and stands staring at the crucifix, quivering from top to toe. His hands move convulsively. At length, jerking his hand toward CLARA, he says in a stifled voice.*] Do you see that? Is it He or I hangs there?

CLARA [*gently*]. Why is it supposed to be so beautiful? [*Taking him by the arm.*] It always seems wrong to me. Does a crucified really hang his head like that? He has cried "It is finished." It is supposed to be a triumph. But He hangs His head. It looks like defeat. [*Pause.*] Shall I take it away? [*She stretches toward it.*

BENTLEY. Don't touch it. I'll get equal with it some day.

CLARA. If it's hurting you——

BENTLEY. It is not hurting me. It can't hurt me, and it never will.

CLARA. Then you wish?—What would you like me to do with it? [*No answer.*] Won't you have dinner with us to-night for a change? Why not leave this room which oppresses you? [*Coming up to him.*] Won't you speak to me, Oswald?

[*No answer. She looks as if she is going to be angry, but controls herself and goes out. BENTLEY sits down at the desk and buries his head in his hands. A bell rings off in the pantry. BRYANT, passing across, is about to disappear when*

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BENTLEY *looks up*. *Resolution seems to come to him*. He stands up, pulls a packet out of his pocket, then he unlocks the drawer and, opening it, takes out a revolver. He loads and lifts the pistol casually to his temple, then lowers it as if considering. He hears BRYANT returning. BRYANT, smiling softly, comes in. BENTLEY takes a quick glance over his shoulder and sees BRYANT. Then, exclaiming "Not my turn—his," he faces slowly round and, trembling violently, covers BRYANT, whose face becomes immobile.

BENTLEY [*in a stifled voice*]. Come closer. [BRYANT, smiling gently, approaches.] Let me see your face . . . the eyes are his . . . I am going to kill you. So pray.

BRYANT [*firmly, but compassionately*]. It is you who need to pray. See how one crime leads to another. I will pray for you!

BENTLEY [*faltering*]. I am going to kill you.

BRYANT. You cannot kill that which does not exist. [*Strangely*.] If you shoot you will not kill me, for I am the Paul Vyson who exists in your mind: I am your Conscience.

BENTLEY [*putting down the revolver with deliberation*]. Then I say to you, go. I have no conscience.

BRYANT [*very softly and distinctly*]. Coward!

BENTLEY. What?

BRYANT [*as before*]. Coward! Coward!

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BENTLEY. Take care.

[His hand moves toward the revolver.]

BRYANT. If you shoot at me that proves you the greatest coward of all. For three days you have avoided me.

BENTLEY *[in savage distress]*. For what have you returned? Tell me, are you living or dead? Why should you dog me? If you are not cruelty incarnate, turn away your eyes and speak to me as one human to another, if human you are. *[BRYANT looks at him more gently.]* Speak. Are you not Paul Vyson?

BRYANT *[in a changed voice]*. There, there! I am in a sense Paul Vyson, though I care not to be known as such. He died in prison. Afterwards his body was drowned. Only his voice now lives.

BENTLEY. I do not understand you . . .

[He sinks into his chair.]

BRYANT. It is quite simple. You sent me money and a ticket just before my sentence expired. Lovely are the works of God and marvelous His judgements. You thought to be rid of me.

BENTLEY. I sent it to you because I loved you.

[A strange expression passes over BRYANT's face.]

BRYANT *[quite silently, and with no apparent bitterness]*. After you had ruined me.

BENTLEY. I ruined you! No. It was necessity.

BRYANT *[smiling with gentle irony]*. Conscience hears that phrase every day. *[With more sharpness than he has hitherto shown.]* Through

your wickedness I became a convict. I lived with the brute, the degraded, the false. The false! [*He shudders.*] When the time came for me to go out into the world again—into a world now, owing to you, exclusively composed of enemies—another man went with me. He was a forger: one of the cleverest and subtlest criminals then living. He was in for a small crime—the full tale of his deeds was not known to the police, and now never will be. I gave him the ticket and some of the money—*your* ticket and *your* money. As for him—[*sepulchrally*] *you* know where he lies.

BENTLEY [*passionately*]. And so an innocent man is dead. And now you return to torment me.

BRYANT [*with sudden fire*]. To torment you! No! To save you. [*With august deliberation.*] I have had a revelation: the soul is judged in this world and can be saved in this world. I have come to judge and save you.

BENTLEY. You—to judge me!

BRYANT [*quietly*]. Why not? Who is juster—you who ruined me, or I who would save you?

BENTLEY. We can only judge ourselves. No man can judge us.

BRYANT. What judgement did you not allow the Court of Law to pronounce on me? And is it I judging you now or your own Conscience?

BENTLEY [*with loathing*]. But you—you!

BRYANT. God does not always choose the lovely as his instruments, or even the good. Remember Rahab——

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BENTLEY. How long have you been reading the Bible?

BRYANT. Seven years: my sentence. One learns in that time, in such a place, in solitude and sorrow. I scoffed once: I believe now. Listen to me: I come to you from God: I am he that was dead and is alive through Christ Our Lord.

BENTLEY. Through Christ? No, no, you have nothing to do with Christ. [*Turning to the crucifix.*] O infinite compassion, speak to me! Counsel me, is this your messenger? Will you not judge me, and not he? [*Pause, shaking his head.*] So silent?

BRYANT [*strangely*]. Perhaps that is His sentence: that I should judge you and not He.

BENTLEY [*looking up*]. Ah, how can I tell if yours be the tongue of an angel or a devil?

BRYANT. Doubt: the devil's sin, on which all sins are founded. Believe and be saved. Doubt and perish!

BENTLEY [*passionately*]. I will believe; I want to believe, but in my soul I feel, I know, you are evil.

BRYANT [*with great gentleness, coming and laying his hand on BENTLEY's shoulder as he crouches in the chair*]. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone"—and do you say that to me?

BENTLEY [*broken, without looking up*]. Very well. What will you have me do?

BRYANT [*gently and winningly*]. Confess. Confess before all: not alone and in confidence to

each separately, but in a common gathering—before your wife, before Lois, before Adderly—even as you fastened the crime on me before your wife, before Lois, and before Adderly. And after that you shall confess in a Court of Law, as I was convicted in a Court of Law. Thus only can you redeem your soul.

BENTLEY [*stilly*]. It is too much. I will not.

BRYANT [*watching him narrowly*]. What? Is that so terrible? Is to confess and put right the wrong you have done a more frightful ordeal than to have sentence pronounced on you for a deed you never did?

BENTLEY. No, no, I cannot.

BRYANT. And to be cast into prison—and—listen, Bentley—to lose the woman you love? [*Pause.*] And not only to lose her, but to lose her esteem? All that happened to me.

BENTLEY. And you wish the same for me—prison, the loss of my wife and her esteem?

BRYANT [*slowly*]. I do not wish it. It is the price. With that measure we mete withal——

BENTLEY [*frantically*]. Stop preaching! Let me go. Let me go. [*Change of tone.*] Granted I am guilty—be reasonable. I am about to atone for my guilt by giving away all I possess.

BRYANT. All that you gained, in fact, by ruining me. I know exactly how much you can give: thirty pieces of silver. [*More softly.*] And afterwards Judas went out and hanged himself?

BENTLEY [*hoarsely*]. Do you demand my death?

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BRYANT. No. I demand your salvation.

[*Silence.*]

BENTLEY [*moodily*]. I will be rid of you.
You are only my valet. [*He moves away.*]

BRYANT. No man can be rid of his Conscience but by destroying it, and that [*pocketing the revolver, unseen by BENTLEY*] you have already failed to do. Therefore, choose now—joy and life or misery and the death of the sinner.

BENTLEY. I am too weak. [*He sinks into the chair again.*] The choice is not mine. It is forced upon me.

BRYANT. Quarrel not with the instruments of God, but do His bidding. [*Pause.*] Persist, and live in the torment of knowing He watches you: obey, and be at peace. [*Silence.*]

BENTLEY [*at last*]. I will . . . I will confess.

[*A sound like a sharp sigh escapes BRYANT.*]

BRYANT [*unsteadily*]. Are you sure? Think what it will cost.

BENTLEY [*gloomily*]. It must be done.

BRYANT. That is not the spirit in which to do it.

BENTLEY [*as before*]. It must be done.

BRYANT. Don't be in a hurry. Think what it will imply. For instance, Lois will have to break her engagement with young Adderly.

BENTLEY. No.

BRYANT. Yes. You damaged his father—are you now to damage him? Is he to take a wife from the house of a liar, an embezzler, a thief?

BENTLEY. If he loves her.

BRYANT. Does he? Will he when he knows

what sort of man his partner and best friend was?

[BRYANT *watches him closely.*

BENTLEY. God cannot demand such a thing.

BRYANT. What do the guilty know of God?

BENTLEY. But I can't: she is the messenger of God to me.

BRYANT. As such would she not have you confess? Would she stand between you and salvation? [*Coming closer. Insidiously.*] If she knew now would she not bid you confess? She is clean and pure, and has the cruelty of that which is clean and pure. She would make you confess. And she would be right. [*Pause. BENTLEY begins to shiver.*] Might she not even denounce you for your soul's good? Does it make you feel better to know that she loves and trusts you and believes in the good in you, who are utterly false? Think of her beautiful eyes piercing your soul with their fearlessness and trust. Think of her gentleness, meekness, honesty, and unutterable goodness of which you are not worthy. [*Very softly.*] And yet you alone are to suffer. And she is good and she is not to suffer. Will she not welcome the opportunity to suffer for you—she who [*with the slightest emphasis on the penultimate word*] has loved you always with a pure love?

BENTLEY [*muttering*]. What is good in me, what is good in her tortures me. [*Dreamily, with an atrocious expression.*] You are right. It is her turn.

BRYANT. But——

BENTLEY. Having saved me, would you now

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stand in the way of her, of my, salvation? Go, before I repent of the choice I have taken. [BRYANT *stands as if amazed*. BENTLEY *advances on him*.] Go. Do you hear? Go, before I break every bone in your body—[*quivering with dry rage*—you phantom! [*He laughs, grinding his teeth*. BRYANT, *scared*, *retires*. BENTLEY *advances to the crucifix*. *Addressing it*.] Not my will but *Thy* will, *Thy* will, eh? Very well. It shall be done. [*In a low intense voice*.] But I'll have no cross over my grave when I die [*with twitching fingers held to the face of the crucifix*]—do you hear that, you God of Love?

[*He strides to the fire and stands looking down into it—his eyes glowering, his head sunk between his shoulders, his feet wide apart, his hands spread stiffly out as if he wished to warm them*. LOIS *comes in at the conservatory doors*.

LOIS [*to attract his attention*]. Bryant will be late for the post if he doesn't hurry. I passed him in the drive. [BENTLEY *turns*.] Why, Oswald, what's happened? You look as if you'd been struggling with a devil.

BENTLEY [*with sour humour*]. My Conscience has been having a few words with me.

LOIS. Don't mock: it isn't like you. Your eyes when you turned were wicked. I never saw them so before. [*She takes off her hat*.] That's better. [*Going up to him*.] You look so ruffled. There, be calm, my dearest. [*She lays her hand on his shoulder*.] Why can't you meet my eyes? [*He*

keeps turning his head away.] Come now, Oswald, look at me.

BENTLEY. Lois, do you love me? Will you stick to me?

LOIS. It is neither kind nor necessary to ask, Oswald. You know what you have been to me. I hope you feel what I have tried to be to you.

BENTLEY [*rushing at her and seizing her by the shoulders. With vehemence*]. If you don't, I'm damned. I have now come to a place where I stand upon a razor edge with an abyss on each side. [*She looks at him long and searchingly. He looses her. With intensity.*] I know whither I am to go, but the razor edge I cannot see. You shall guide me along it. [*Pause. Sitting down in the arm-chair.*] Let it be as it was three days ago. [*He motions for her to pull the footstool across the floor and seat herself by him. She does so. Finally she leans against him. He has shut his eyes and placed his left hand upon her shoulder.*] You have been happy with Clara and myself?

LOIS [*low*]. Yes.

BENTLEY. You have been happy with me?

LOIS. Yes. I owe you everything. [*As before.*] Go on.

BENTLEY. Clara and I have been married some time. Marriage is not always all that we think it is going to be.

[*He leans forward. He places both hands on her shoulders.*

LOIS [*shrinking*]. Don't. You hold me so tight.

ACT THREE

BENTLEY [*intensely*]. I must. For now I must speak.

[*Lois, shakes herself free, jumps up, and faces him.*]

LOIS [*clasping her hands*]. Don't, oh, don't! Now at last I begin to be afraid. [*Wringing her hands.*] Say it's not that! Say it's not that!

BENTLEY [*staring at her*]. What?

LOIS [*piteously*]. Say it's not that!

BENTLEY. You've guessed——?

LOIS [*imploring*]. Don't say you love me.

BENTLEY [*half out of chair, almost roaring with pain*]. Love you? [*He rises.*] Love you?
[*He glares at her.*]

LOIS. I'll do anything you wish if you'll only say it's not that.

BENTLEY. You would do something for me?

LOIS [*terrified*]. Anything but——

BENTLEY. Give up Rupert.

LOIS. You have said it. [*She rocks.*] Oh, Oswald, I love you so much: I never thought you would have said that.

BENTLEY [*approaching her*]. Didn't you say three days ago, as you sat by me in that chair, that you could do anything for Rupert—you could die for him? It is for his good.

LOIS. You swear it is for his good. You will not benefit? You are not going to play me false?

BENTLEY. False? No. Listen. Something has happened, something has been discovered that makes it imperative that you should give him up.

GUILTY SOULS

It is an affair between honour and dishonour, and in that choice involves a selection between my soul and his love. By giving him up you will save my soul. If you do not give him up I perish. If you do I am saved. I swear it is so.

LOIS [*fiery*]. And who inflicts the choice on me?

BENTLEY. God.

LOIS [*slowly*]. No. It is impossible. God never sets us more than we are able to perform.

BENTLEY. And so He has set you this—that out of your magnanimity you might choose the harder. The proof of its hardness is the proof that it comes from God. No man would impose it. God alone knows the capacity of our hearts.

LOIS [*looking at him, shaking her head*]. Oswald, Oswald, you are breaking my heart.

BENTLEY. Would you break his?

LOIS. What d'you mean? How can I give him up? I love him. Can't you understand that?

BENTLEY. But it will be for his good. I swear to you it will be for his good.

LOIS. But how, how will it be, how can it be for his good?

BENTLEY. I cannot now explain. Lois, have pity on me. Trust me. Give him up. You said yourself we are none of us entitled to happiness.

LOIS. I did not know how much I loved him.

BENTLEY. If you love him you must die for him. You swore that you could die for him. It is for his good.

LOIS. You swear it is for his good? You are not going to play me false?

ACT THREE

BENTLEY. Play you false! Have I ever deceived you? [*Falling on his knees. Savagely.*] Give him up till to-morrow! [*Raising his hands.*] I swear it will be for his good.

LOIS [*intensely, going to him and searching his face with her eyes*]. What d'you mean? If I give him up it must be at once, and once and for all.

BENTLEY [*leaping up*]. The moment has come. Consent, consent.

LOIS [*shivering*]. I believe you when you say it is for his good. There is something here that I miss. I know by your voice that you speak the truth. I see by your eyes that you will not harm me, that what I feared worse than death is not moving in your thoughts . . . but, though I feel my hour has come, I fear I boasted of what I couldn't perform! I can't give him up, though I believe it is for his good.

BENTLEY [*snatching her wrist*]. Lois, God demands it. [*She stifles a shriek. Terribly.*] What did you say to me about being unwilling to give up? Does that [*indicating the crucifix*] mean nothing to you?

LOIS [*falling on her knees in terror before BENTLEY*]. Ah, don't bring that into it.

BENTLEY [*loudly*]. I must. It is the touchstone.

LOIS [*twisting her arms*]. Have mercy! Oh, have mercy. You know I cannot resist it.

BENTLEY [*wilder and wilder*]. Who agreed with me that between heaven and hell there is only this life in which to do right? And what is doing right but to do good to the man you love? What

GUILTY SOULS

is right, did you not say, but learning to give up? [*Softly, but with extraordinary intensity, holding his hands above her head as if consecrating a victim.*] Who was it worshipped a Somebody because that Somebody knew it was better to shed His life apparently vainly for others than to live selfishly?

LOIS [*faintly*]. Mercy

BENTLEY [*towering, stretching his arms apart, exalted, in a clear, calm voice.*] Who was it said she believed that God in His mercy makes us despair, that even so we might fall into His arms ever opened for us upon the cross?

[*Silence.* BENTLEY *lowers his arms and stands tense, watching her.*

LOIS [*her head bowed, at last, humbly*]. Forgive me, Oswald. [*Lifting her voice.*] Yes, my time has come. I have been happy a whole two days: that is too long for a God who suffers. I am willing blindly to believe it will be for his good. You say it will be, and you have never deceived me yet. It is true, too, that we have no right to happiness. We transgress to think we have, since He [*stretching her arm out toward the crucifix but without turning her head*], Who perfectly deserved it, never claimed it. [*She rises.*] Let me collect myself.

[*She walks away shuddering. He stares after her.*

RUPERT [*without*]. Lois!

[*LOIS turns swiftly. She is calm, passionless, almost stern.*

ACT THREE

LOIS. Go. Rupert is coming.

[BENTLEY looks at her as if stupefied. Then he goes out by the door to the right. LOIS walks a little way forward and stands perfectly still. Her eyes are closed, her lips move. There is a step in the conservatory. RUPERT, in evening dress covered by an overcoat, appears. He comes very cheerfully through the conservatory doors.]

RUPERT. Lois—at last!

[He makes toward her as though to kiss her . . . but she avoids him and goes abruptly to the door on the right.]

LOIS. We'd best turn the lights up.

[She turns up the light.]

RUPERT. I tried for you earlier in the evening. I'm going on out to dinner. I've only got a minute or two . . .

LOIS. It will be sufficient.

RUPERT. Eh? What's up? [He advances.] You look pale.

LOIS. Don't, stay where you are.

RUPERT. What is it—nothing serious?

LOIS [change of tone]. Stand with your back to that table, Rupert. [He does so.] I'm going to shoot you. Oh, no; not really. [Change of tone.] You didn't really love me in the garden, did you, Rupert? [Piteously.] Say you didn't.

RUPERT. Lois, what sort of man d'you think I am? [He chokes.]

LOIS [shaking her head]. I'm afraid you did

GUILTY SOULS

then. We have no right to happiness. [*She raises her right hand as if she were going to shoot.*] It will go through your heart. [*Steadily.*] Listen: I won't marry you. That's final. [*Dropping her arm.*] Forgive me.

RUPERT [*blazing*]. Why torture me? Why not fire a real bullet and have done? Come, you can't mean it. [*Slowly.*] It was a joke. [*She remains silent, slowly shaking her head.*] It can't be over already. What d'you mean? Why can't you marry me?

LOIS. I didn't say I couldn't. I said I wouldn't.

RUPERT. But why won't you marry me? Come, say it's a mood. Have I offended you by not seeing you for three days? It's not my fault. Bentley's condition prevented it: I had to do all his work . . . Why won't you say something? What's come over you?

LOIS [*as if weary*]. I've discovered I won't marry you. Don't ask questions, or you may force me to tell lies. I tell you this thing can't be any different from what it is. I've treated you badly. Let it go at that. Try to forgive me if you can.

RUPERT. But why? Why? Why?

LOIS. We have no right to happiness. It's only given us for a moment, that we may show what we are capable of.

RUPERT. Then you do love me?

LOIS. Do you wish me to deny it? I asked you to ask no questions.

RUPERT. Lois, I've loved you ever since I saw you that morning in Bentley's office.

ACT THREE

LOIS [*in a low tone*]. I know, Rupert, I know. Yes, it was in Bentley's office. Don't recall it.

RUPERT. That's seven and more years ago now. I loved you then. I love you still. I only want to know why.

LOIS [*at last, automatically*]. It is for your own good, Rupert.

RUPERT. I don't understand you. I think it's a mood. Perhaps I'd best go.

[*He makes as if to go.*

LOIS. Once you pass through these doors [*pointing to the conservatory*] it will be final.

[*He stops.*

RUPERT [*coming back*]. You don't really mean it, Lois? Be reasonable. Why should this be so?

LOIS. We must give up.

RUPERT. It's a whim. You've got some self-sacrificing idea in your head. You've got some silly notion about not being fit or something. I know I felt dreadfully unworthy all day before I asked you. [*Silence.*] Or it's something in circumstances: you think that having been practically in the position of an orphan . . .

LOIS. There's no explanation. I just won't marry you—that's all.

[*Silence.*

RUPERT [*sadly*]. Don't be proud, Lois. Acknowledge that was it. [*Silence. With sudden vehemence.*] By Heaven, it is though! What was it Clara said? I've got it. You've been talking to Bentley.

[*She starts.*

LOIS. That has nothing to do with it.

RUPERT. It has. He told you what he's told

GUILTY SOULS

Clara and which Clara told me. He's going to give away his money—every penny of it.

LOIS [*suddenly*]. What?

RUPERT. He's going to give away every penny. That's it. Isn't it?

LOIS [*slowly*]. Yes. That's it.

RUPERT. And you——

LOIS. Well?

RUPERT. Don't force me to put it. [*She smiles oddly.*] Well, you haven't anything.

LOIS [*in a reverie*]. Not even love. [*She sighs. Aloud.*] I owe the Bentleys everything. Without them I am nothing.

RUPERT. Yes?

LOIS. Well? Say it.

RUPERT. What has come over you? Are you too proud to acknowledge your foolishness? *Do* smile! Can't you see how silly it is?

LOIS. What?

RUPERT. Must I say it? Forgive me. You think you won't marry me because you fear people will say you're marrying me for my money—that you are getting out of a difficult situation, because you've learned since you accepted me that Bentley's going to give away every penny. [*Lois nods.*] But it's not fair. I know you love me.

LOIS. Do you? How can you see into my heart? I asked you not to make me tell lies. What I pretended just now about having no explanation was a lie. But I was ashamed to tell you the truth. I was indeed going to marry you for your money all along. I have no position with the Bentleys.

ACT THREE

I'm fond of them, of course, but dependence on people doesn't make one any fonder. And I like you. You are simple. I was going to marry you for your money all right . . . only at the last minute . . . besides, now Bentley's giving away his money it's too obvious—even for me. That's the truth; so now you know. Hurt me, please: I deserve it.

RUPERT [*hotly*]. It is not the truth.

LOIS. Very well: it is not the truth. You know better than I, of course.

RUPERT. I don't believe it—I——

LOIS. Don't wound me by turning this into a wrangle. I have told you the truth. I was going to marry you for your money. I intended to do so from the first. But in the end I couldn't quite manage it. Please go.

RUPERT. You know what you've just said. You really mean that?

LOIS. You'll be late out to dinner.

RUPERT. Am I to leave the house thinking that? It's entirely contrary to your nature. I don't believe Bentley will give away his money. There must be another reason.

LOIS. I have given you the reason.

RUPERT [*slowly*]. No, there is another. [*In sudden despair, abruptly.*] No: my luck's out. I don't please you—he's a magnetic man. I see it now: you have a passion for Bentley.

LOIS [*drawing away to the very wall of the room in horror, brokenly*]. Who suggested that? You'd never think that yourself. It's not you.

GUILTY SOULS

RUPERT. Clara said——

LOIS [*stung*]. Clara! [*Slowly.*] What did Clara say?

RUPERT. She said all that was best in you might impel you to the worst.

LOIS [*covering her face*]. Oh, cease torturing me and go—go!

[*She gestures, weakly. But he does not go. He remains staring at her.*]

RUPERT [*painfully*]. Then it is true?

LOIS [*advancing*]. Do you believe that? For, if you do, you have lost me anyway. [*He moves toward the conservatory doors, looking over his shoulder, appalled at the ruin he has caused*]. I think you do. [*She stops, leaning on one hand on the table, looking at him as he stands by the conservatory doors.*] You used the word “passion,” speaking of Bentley and me. Passion! [*He opens the door.*] Ah, God! when I sought a cross I was too presumptuous. I forgot the humiliation. I did not see that I should be mocked when crucified. Go now. Go. I want never to see you again.

[*He goes. LOIS leans her head against the wall by the doors. CLARA, entering quickly from the right, stops short.*]

CLARA. Lois, quick! Oswald's in such a state. [*Pause.*] Lois, dear, I'm speaking to you. I thought perhaps you . . . [*On the verge of sharpness.*] Lois, listen: he's nearly raving . . . will you do nothing for him?

[*Lois suddenly turns round with a gesture to*

ACT THREE

CLARA *to be silent*. BENTLEY's voice is heard.

BENTLEY [*without*]. Lois, Lois!

[LOIS wrenches the conservatory doors open and escapes.

CLARA [*in stupefaction*]. Lois, where are you going?

[BENTLEY enters from the right. He has a mad look.

BENTLEY [*low, savagely*]. No, no, I tell you, that is not the truth. You lie. You are a devil. God does not require it.

CLARA [*clutching the lapels of his coat*]. Oswald, recollect yourself. Be calm. Listen: I came in and found Lois by these doors. When I spoke to her she wouldn't answer. She gave me one look and went.

BENTLEY [*vacantly*]. What? What? [*Hand to head.*] Lois . . . where?

CLARA. Out into the garden.

BENTLEY. Was anyone with her when you came in?

CLARA. I think I heard Rupert's voice, but I'm not sure. He wasn't here when I came in. Oswald, she looked so desperate.

BENTLEY [*passionately*]. She shall not! She shall not, I say! [*He opens the doors.*] Lois! [*No answer. Louder.*] Lois!

CLARA. If anything should happen to her. You know how high-strung she is.

[BENTLEY goes into the conservatory.

GUILTY SOULS

BENTLEY [*in conservatory, shouting*]. Lois!

[*No answer. BENTLEY returns from the conservatory and all but closes the doors. His lips are compressed. He shakes his head.*

CLARA. I think I'll put on a coat and go after Rupert—if it was Rupert—and try to bring him back.

BENTLEY [*absently*]. I thought you told me in the drawing-room that he'd gone out to dinner.

CLARA. So he has. To the Bassetts'.

BENTLEY [*as before*]. Eh? . . . You can't invade . . .

CLARA. I shall have to.

[*She goes out to the right. BENTLEY goes toward the conservatory doors; then, as if a thought comes to him, he stops short and strides into the pantry. He returns, driving BRYANT before him.*

BENTLEY [*menacingly*]. You were in that room. The hatch is ajar. Tell me: was Lois talking with Rupert?

BRYANT [*strangely*]. How do you know I was in that room?

BENTLEY. Was she, or was she not?

BRYANT [*mysteriously*]. Perhaps she was talking to me.

BENTLEY. To you!

BRYANT. Why not? Who is it will effect your salvation if not I and she?

BENTLEY. What have you told her?

BRYANT. What would you have me tell her?—

ACT THREE

that, for instance, you are a liar, a thief, a perjurer, a ruiner of many lives——

BENTLEY. What did you do?

BRYANT. I worked for your salvation.

BENTLEY. My salvation! My salvation! Man alive, standing there looking so grave and gentle, what do I care about my salvation? My salvation is her damnation.

BRYANT. Is it so late you learn that one crime brings on another and that the penalty is paid not only by the guilty? O Bentley, Bentley, when you ruined me, why did you not pause to think of that?

BENTLEY. Spare your words. Drive your hook no further into my side. There is the telephone. Summon the police. Denounce me now yourself and have done.

BRYANT [*slowly, lifting his hand*]. It lies not with another to save a fellow soul. Only yourself can save yourself.

BENTLEY [*advancing a pace or two, leaning on the table with one arm, stretching out the other*]. Let me make a bid. If I give up all the wealth I possess and confess to my wife?

BRYANT. "They parted my vesture between them, upon my garments did they cast lots." No.

BENTLEY. If, besides this, I disappear? [BRYANT *shakes his head*.] But, man alive, think what that will mean! I shall forfeit all this life [*gesturing at the room*], I shall never see Clara, I shall never see Lois again. [*Pause*.] You waver. . . . I have won. That is it!

BRYANT [*suddenly blazing up*]. Insult not the

Most High! God does not bargain. He has his price for each soul. Hell gapes for those who cannot pay it. Remorse is not enough. Now you must know terror, and that intimate oppression of shame which is worse than any terror. [*Change of voice.*] When I rose from the dead to come to you I was not of the same form as when I went down into the tomb. Seven years I spent in the tomb. In the tomb we remember. We learn the power for good or ill of remembrance. And I return to you in the figure of the most potent and mysterious of all spiritual beings. Look well at me. [*Advancing and leaning forward over the table so that his chin is nearly on the cloth.*] My name is Memory. There comes a term to all our bravery, caper it how we may. At that term's end, even though you be lying in your death-bed, with the grave gaping beside you, you must front this presence, face this face. [*Pause. Leaning upward and forward, almost whispering.*] What have you to say to it?

BENTLEY [*summoning all his strength, lifting his fists above his head*]. I say to it that I will never submit. Let come damnation—if come it must. As to salvation—the price is too great. I will not pay it. Go back to your Master in heaven or hell and tell him that!

[*He thrusts both hands into his coat pockets and drives BRYANT before him. BRYANT slips out to the pantry. BENTLEY goes to the light by the door and switches it off, saying, moodily, "Sheer darkness*

ACT THREE

now—" *The glowering dusk can be seen without. BENTLEY wanders back and forth but is gradually drawn toward the desk. He leans forward over it on tip-toe, breathing heavily.*

BENTLEY [*in a ghostly voice*]. Are you so still? What, dead already? Have I triumphed? [*Striking a match.*] Let me see Thee, O mine Enemy! [*He holds the match near the crucifix. Then he lights the candles. He sits down and stares at the crucifix. Slowly and sadly.*] I am sorry for Thee, poor faithful one. Thy face was never more beautiful than it is now. And Thou hast died in vain. [*The conservatory doors open very gently and then close. Lois has come in. She stands as if exhausted, with her arms spread along the T of the glass door. Standing thus she has, as she glimmers against the very last of the dim red, bleak afterglow, suddenly the appearance of one crucified. BENTLEY slowly looks up. Then he half rises. In fear.*] Ahhrrr!

LOIS [*stilly*]. It's finished.

[*Her head falls forward.*

BENTLEY [*gazing at her, then at the crucifix, and back at her*]. Clara was wrong. The head does fall forward. [*To the crucifix again, with a great cry.*] Who shall escape God? [*Lois, unseen by him, has stumbled out by the door to the right. BENTLEY turns, with arms flung wide.*] Hozannah! You have saved me. What, gone? A vision? [*To the crucifix.*] Though Thou dost slay me, yet will I trust in Thee. Now—— [*He*

GUILTY SOULS

rushes and locks the door to right.] To work!
To work! [*He sits down and pulls out sheets of paper.*] The night is far spent. Joy cometh in the morning.

[He settles down to write at the desk.

QUICK CURTAIN

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ACT FOUR



ACT FOUR

The following morning. Frosty sunshine behind the conservatory. Everything very still and nothing stiller than the form of BRYANT, standing by the pantry door watching BENTLEY, who sprawls in uneasy slumber over his desk littered with papers. The candles have burned low. They continue alight throughout the act. Without-doors a black-bird is singing, and from far away floats the sound of church bells. BENTLEY stirs in his sleep. BRYANT makes a move as if to go, and then glides across to take up a position directly behind BENTLEY. BENTLEY cries in his sleep, and the sobs, as is usual in adults crying in their sleep, take on a curiously child-like quality.

BRYANT [*whispering*]. Cry, baby! Cry, baby! Time was when I did that.

[BENTLEY moves and, yet asleep, lifts his head, smiles, clasps his hands and stretches them out. Then, with a shivering motion, as if deathly cold, awakes and turns in his chair so that he faces the front of the fire, which has gone out. His head falls forward. He glances uneasily from side to side. His teeth chatter.

BENTLEY [*shivering*]. What! Still here? Still living? The price yet to pay? [*In reverie, while the tears continue to course down his face.*] I slept and I dreamed it was accomplished—I wept—my heart was breaking—there came a silent angel, with a hidden face, who I think was Lois, and laid her hands upon my breast [*he winces, and sadly*

shakes his head—one gush of flame and it was all over—we ascended face to face! A dream! The deed is still to do—and, though she's crucified, I cannot do it—a dream, a vision—and yet face to face!

BRYANT [*leaning forward, sadly*]. Face to face, indeed. The crucifier and his crucified!

[BENTLEY *flings round in his chair and strikes at BRYANT*.]

BRYANT [*stepping back a pace*]. Softly, softly. You must not strike me. I am not one of those crucified for your salvation.

BENTLEY. Fiend! Fiend!

BRYANT. Do you call me fiend? I call you Judas. I am sorry for you, Judas. Do you weep for her? Go and kiss her on the cheek—Judas, Judas!

BENTLEY. Judas, is it?

[*He advances threateningly*.]

BRYANT [*calmly and sadly*]. Bentley, you are throwing away your soul.

BENTLEY [*stopping*]. Let me throw it then: I am content to lose it by attributing too much mercy to God. In that desk there [*pointing to the writing-table*] lies a statement. I have spent the night upon it. When I began it, influenced by her example, I thought there could be but one termination to my suffering—to confess before God and man. But I see I have fallen into your trap. I have crucified her and I have sinned by doubting the mercy of God. I thought I was bankrupt: but I find I have one more card to play—that very

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ACT FOUR

soul's salvation you proffer me. From the tree, on which she is nailed, will I take her down. It is I, not she, shall lie in the sepulchre. You have called me Judas. Let me finish as Judas finished. You gave me the choice of death or deliverance. "I am your Conscience," you said, "and I do not quit you till you either die or confess." I take my choice and I choose death.

[He turns and jerks open a drawer in the writing-table.]

BRYANT. Poor fool! *[BENTLEY turns.]* Do you think you can outwit God? *[He runs to the farther end of the table, pulling a chair out as he goes. Then he whips the revolver from his pocket and holds it aloft. In ecstasy.]* See—loaded in every chamber: Death! Salvation! Rest! Peace! Eternal silence!

[BENTLEY rushes at him. BRYANT immediately covers him. BENTLEY hesitates.]

BENTLEY. Well then, shoot, man, and have done!

BRYANT *[in cold scorn]*. Not I!

BENTLEY. Shoot: be merciful!

BRYANT. Ah, Bentley, Bentley, now at last you see quite clearly what you want, and you are right. Let me hold my treasure up. *[BENTLEY, fascinated, watches him. BRYANT lifts the revolver with a slow, hieratic gesture.]* Worship it, Bentley; bow before it—the beautiful, the unattainable! Here hides the flame that licks all clean! Here lurks the bolt that can carry the hapless to the land of darkness! No more sin, Bentley, and

so no more pain. Death! death! death!—answer of every riddle, solution of all cruxes! [*Change of tone.*] Look well at it, Bentley. [*Lowering his hands and holding the revolver forward in the palms of his hands.*] I hold it in my hands. How small, how black, how beautiful it is—made like a watch—and when it strikes there is a period put to the tyranny of life's galling hour! You would like it? Ah, you want it, Bentley, do you? You yearn for it: it is so pretty: such an honest little plaything. It deals justly by those who use it. It is a fair partner. Not like you, Bentley. It kills once for all, and so delivers once for all. It does not kill and yet leave alive. When once it has spoken the body falls never to rise again. It breeds no ghosts, Bentley. [*Advancing softly.*] Feed your eyes upon it, Bentley: you—are—not—going—to—have it. [BENTLEY, *slowly leaning forward, stretches out his hand . . .*] Oh, no, it's too great a luxury for a man as rich in crime as you: a liar, a swindler, a destroyer! See how it shines! [BRYANT *holds it up.*] It is dearer to you now than anything in the world; but I will not give it to you, no, not though you fall on your knees to me as I did in that office eight years ago to you. [BENTLEY *gapes, his eyes seem starting out of his head as they devour BRYANT's face.*] Three times I called upon you, Bentley, and thrice I got no answer. You broke my heart then. God be thanked—I am breaking yours now!

BENTLEY [*gradually straightening himself up, slowly*]. I look at you and I see you as you are.

ACT FOUR

Poor, poor Vyson. Is this your last resort—to blaspheme God?

BRYANT [*taken aback, faintly*]. What d'you mean?

BENTLEY. Alas, poor friend, you sought to do evil, and you can only do well.

BRYANT [*covering him unsteadily*]. Don't anger me.

BENTLEY [*as before*]. Shoot if you wish. I see that, guilty as I am, I am less guilty than you. And I grieve for you.

BRYANT [*hushedly*]. What has come to you? [*He lowers the revolver.*] Have I turned your wits as you turned mine? If so, then I am sadly cheated.

[*With a look of genuine pity he offers BENTLEY the revolver.*]

BENTLEY [*disregarding the offer*]. No: it is I have come to my wits and see you so clearly at last that from the bottom of my soul I grieve for you. Put that thing away. Face something more terrible than murder. [BRYANT, *watching BENTLEY's face with a sort of hypnotic attention, automatically restores the revolver to his pocket.*] Listen; you have sought to circumvent God. You came here for your revenge. You made your heart strong. But merciful is God and omnipotent—nothing can stand against Him, not my weakness or your strength. I understand it all now—you came to torture me and to gloat over my torture. [*Pause. He watches BRYANT's face.*] I see I have spoken true. [*Change of tone.*] To

torture me you blasphemed: taking the figure and name of my Conscience. That is your sin. And God has dealt with you according to your sin. Out of every evil God creates good. He has frustrated your evil—by taking you at your word. You *have* become my Conscience, and that Conscience is driving me to good. Revenge! Revenge! A little word, a small word, a mean word: how powerless before the magnanimity of God! Ah, Vyson, God performs miracles every day! I knew not good till I had done evil. So it will be with you. Even you will He save.

BRYANT [*agitated*]. No, No! What are you saying? What are you doing? Would you destroy me twice?

BENTLEY [*calmly, but with deep conviction*]. You and I—we guilty souls—we shall see God. Even now the miracle goes forward.

BRYANT [*uneasily*]. Words, words. You're philosophising. . . .

[*He makes as if to go toward the pantry door.*]

BENTLEY. Escape! Why are you so pale? . . . Why do you tremble . . .? Is truth so frightful . . .? Is it so hard a thing to face God?

BRYANT [*advancing*]. I tremble, do I? You think I am afraid—I who have undergone all pangs of death but dissolution! Learn, then: you lie [*with contorted face*]*—there is no God!*

BENTLEY. He must be very near you for you to deny Him with such vehemence.

BRYANT. Ah, I could tear your heart out and stamp it into fragments!

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BENTLEY. Hark, how we would torture others that we might escape our own torture! [*Shaking his head sadly.*] I know—wasn't it when I was in just such a state that in your perversity you succeeded in making me torture Lois? We fly from pleasure to despair, and from despair to cruelty: but all in vain. Feed, then, on the disillusion of your pleasure, your despair, your cruelty. Press the spines of torture into your heart. God's advent is not save in anguish. Our hearts bear Him in blood and tears.

BRYANT. Stop, stop! Enough: folly! madness! [*He makes for the pantry door.*] Bentley, I'm going. You will never see me again.

BENTLEY [*softly*]. You came to me as my Conscience. You pursued me, you haunted me. Now it is your turn to be pursued, to be haunted. As for me, I have learned it is time to face about and brave the terror. See, here is my hand. [*BENTLEY offers his hand.*] Wouldn't it be better to stay and meet God together?

[*BRYANT gapes at him.*]

BENTLEY. No? . . . think: they are all coming in here presently—Clara, Rupert, Lois, I have summoned them to hear my confession.

BRYANT [*weakly*] Your——

BENTLEY. My confession. Yes.

BRYANT [*slowly*]. I see. [*With quiet coldness.*] And you're going to have the magnanimity to restore me what you stole. Thank you.

BENTLEY [*bowing his head*]. Your scorn is part of the price. But I do not ask you to stay to

wreak that scorn. I ask you to stay to see a man saved.

BRYANT. I would rather die: I have died once. Leave me in my tomb. Do not disinter me for a second martyrdom.

BENTLEY [*shaking his head*]. That is not why you are in such a panic to go.

BRYANT [*with chill ferocity*]. It is. I tell you it is. I will not endure the ignominy of receiving my life again at your hands. I will not again face a court of law and its curiosity, nor change the spite for the pity—the unpardonable pity!—of the herd. Send me money if you must—I'll accept it. And render me this further justice—give the dead leave to bury their dead. Never mention my name till I have time to be out of your sight for ever. You put bonds on me once—suffer me to escape now.

BENTLEY [*calm but exalted*]. Go, then. You will not escape. God is upon your heels: you will never shake Him off any more than you can shake off your shadow. All the earth lies before you. Wander it as you will. Find rest if you can. Soon will God teach you there is no rest anywhere for the soul save in His bosom.

BRYANT. A hellish benediction! Bentley, you are more cruel than ever I——!

BENTLEY. Go, and the blessing of a guilty soul—my very guilty soul—go with you.

BRYANT [*almost inarticulate with pain, rage, and mortification, lifting crooked fingers*]. I turn

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your blessing back into your bosom: may it prove a curse!

[BRYANT vanishes into the pantry. BENTLEY walks downstage in deep thought. Then, having consulted his watch with a troubled expression, he proceeds to rearrange the room. He goes to the dining-room table and shifts it round so that it stands no longer up and down the stage but across it—remaining, however, over the same patch of carpet. He pulls the arm-chair from the fire and shoves it into the left-hand corner. He pushes the little table-with-the-cigarette-box-on-it away into the right-hand corner. Then he goes and looks at the writing-table. He makes as if to blow out the candles, but, after a glance at the crucifix, refrains. Struck by an idea, he moves the chair from before the writing-table, places it between the writing-table and the revolving bookcase, draws up the footstool before the writing-table, removes a paper—which he places in his pocket—from a drawer, and falls upon his knees on the footstool. He folds his hands, closes his eyes, sighs very heavily; then, rising, leans forward on the table and kisses the figure on the crucifix. After this he stands upright, passes his hands over his forehead,

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moistens his lips, and, going up to the conservatory doors, opens one, looks out, and closes it again. He glances at his watch. Someone fumbles at the handle of the door to the right. BENTLEY goes across and unlocks it, then walks down-stage.

CLARA [*entering*]. Oswald!

BENTLEY [*turning*]. Yes, my dear?

CLARA [*breathless*]. What are you going to do? What have you summoned me for?

BENTLEY. It is early yet. You will see.

CLARA. Oswald, *do* tell me. I couldn't eat any breakfast. Have you had any? *Do* be sensible.

BENTLEY. I think I went and found something in the night. I forgot. I'm not hungry.

CLARA [*looking round*]. Your fire is out. . . . Your candles are burning.

BENTLEY. Yes. Let them be, dear. He shines so brightly between them. He is gay—because that which was lost will be found.

CLARA [*coming and leaning on his breast*]. He is more to you than I, I fear. Oh, if I could only understand. We have been so happy together; where are we now?

BENTLEY [*in a soft, glad voice*]. The candles glisten; the figure is all gold; the room is still. Frost glitters on the panes without: they shine with more than earthly splendour. How white and pure the fields, the air how cold! Sabbath is come. I rise from the dead. The church bells are ringing.

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CLARA. I think they are ringing my burial. [*She puts her arms round his neck and bursts into tears.*] Fate is jealous. I have loved you too much.

BENTLEY [*panicky*]. Don't. There, Clara, there. Let me go. If you cannot help me, do not hinder me. Yes, I'll eat something now if you bring it.

CLARA [*looking at him through her tears*]. Is that all I can do? My lot is hard. Very well then, what would you like?

BENTLEY. Anything. Anything.

[CLARA looks at him, shakes her head, and goes out to the right.]

BENTLEY [*calling after her*]. I am going out into the sunshine a minute.

[*He goes out through the conservatory door.*]

BRYANT comes in from the pantry. He has a crushed look. He goes over to the writing-table and hunts for something—but in vain. He pulls the revolver out of his pocket.

BRYANT [*murmuring*]. Death! Salvation! Rest! Eternal silence!

[*And he lifts the revolver to his breast. But someone is at the door. RUPERT enters from the right. BRYANT hides the revolver behind his back.*]

RUPERT [*briskly*]. Morning, Bryant. Where's Mr. Bentley? [BRYANT does not reply.] What's up? Are you ill? Speak.

BRYANT [*weakly*]. Mr. Bentley has stepped into the garden a moment.

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[RUPERT *turns to the conservatory windows.*

RUPERT. Into the garden?—it's freezing. What for? [*Meanwhile BRYANT has pocketed the revolver.*] What sort of night did he have, you?

BRYANT [*strangely*]. Restless. Restless.

RUPERT. Eh? [*CLARA enters with a plate on which are grapes and some pieces of toast.*] Hello, Clara!

CLARA. Rupert! You here?

RUPERT. He summoned me by telephone late last night.

CLARA. Bryant, you can go. [*But BRYANT does not go.*] Now, Rupert——

BRYANT. If you please, madam——

CLARA. Well, what is it? One moment, Rupert.

BRYANT. I wish to give notice, madam. I wish to leave at once, to-day, this morning.

CLARA. This morning? That's very strange. Why?

BRYANT. I'd have gone anyway, madam. But I thought to take this opportunity, in giving my notice, to warn you, madam, Mr. Bentley is going to ruin you all.

CLARA [*stung*]. How dare you? Leave the room.

BRYANT. As you will, madam.

RUPERT [*advancing on BRYANT*]. What d'you mean, man? Speak it out.

BRYANT. What I said I said. You heard me. Now I'm going. None of you shall stop me.

RUPERT. You will stay here and repeat your words to Mr. Bentley's face.

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BRYANT [*aghast*]. No! No!

CLARA. Let him go, Rupert. [BRYANT *goes*.] It's bad enough as it is without having servants mixed up in it. The sooner he goes the better.

RUPERT. But what did he mean?

CLARA [*bitterly*]. We shall soon know. Oswald summoned me by a note thrust under my door late last night.

RUPERT. And Lois?

CLARA. I don't know. We breakfasted in our rooms: we usually do on Sunday mornings.

RUPERT. You know Lois broke her engagement with me last night?

CLARA. What? Oh, if I'd only found you last night! Where did you get to?

RUPERT. Wandering about. I didn't dine with the Bassetts.

CLARA. I thought of leaving a note at your house, but I didn't know what had happened. I saw Lois was upset.

RUPERT. She said she wished never to see me again. It was something I said about Bentley.

CLARA. She doesn't . . ? Oswald doesn't . . ? They're not going to . . ? O my God! Rupert—

[*She falls forward. RUPERT lowers her into a chair by the table.*]

RUPERT. . . . Better? Don't rush to conclusions. I intend to tax Bentley.

CLARA. Don't do that. I implore you—don't do that!

RUPERT. But only after I've had the doctor on him. When I got the telephone summons from

Bentley I immediately rang up the doctor. He was out at a dangerous case. The maid said she'd send him on when he came in. I instructed her to send him up at once. He should arrive any minute.

CLARA [*feebly*]. Thank you, Rupert. You are good to me. In this present madhouse you are the only one who seems to keep any sense. [*Pause.*] What d'you think Bryant meant?

RUPERT. We shall soon see. [*Leaning over the table and moving the plate.*] Hasn't he breakfasted?

CLARA [*with her head on the table*]. Ah, why have I never been able to pray? Now I would pray if I could!

[*LOIS, unseen, has glided in. She is frightfully pale, with enormous shadows under her eyes. Seeing RUPERT, she backs away. Then she moves toward the writing-table and its crucifix, places one foot on the footstool, and stands with her face covered by her hands.*]

RUPERT [*facing round, making a slight forward gesture*]. Lois!

CLARA [*grasping his elbow with one hand, pointing with the other*]. Look!

[*BENTLEY has loomed up at the conservatory doors. He stands still a moment with struggle in his face. Then, using both hands, he pushes both doors open, steps slowly in, closes them behind him, and looks at CLARA, at RUPERT, and, shuddering, at LOIS.*]

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BENTLEY [*weakly*]. We are all here. No; we are one short. [*He makes for the pantry door . . . but stops.*] Let the dead bury their dead. It is harder so, more difficult for me. No matter. [*Change of tone.*] I have something to say to you all. [*He goes to the left end of the table.*] Rupert—[*He motions for RUPERT to take a chair and sit over to the right of the conservatory doors. CLARA had risen when BENTLEY closed the doors behind him. Now she accepts RUPERT's mute offer of a chair which he takes from the table and places on the spot indicated by BENTLEY. She sits down. RUPERT remains standing by her, between her chair and the door to the right.*] Lois, dear. [*He motions. RUPERT starts, but CLARA gestures for him to be still. LOIS, still covering her face with one hand, sits down in the chair between the writing-table and the revolving bookcase. When she has sat down she leans forward and continues with her face covered by both hands. BENTLEY then takes his stand as before and pulls a paper out of his pocket. With quiet resolution.*] I have something to confess: something which must affect all our relationships and set our lives upon a different course. [*RUPERT bends over CLARA. BENTLEY glances at them.*] Please hear me out in silence. I ask no more. [*Silence: BENTLEY speaks in an even voice; from time to time he casts a glance at the papers.*] You see before you this me, the man known to men as Oswald Bentley: a prosperous, upright man apparently, till lately a henchman of the Church and a Justice of the

Peace. But into my soul you cannot see, any more than I can see into yours. Every one of us is a solitude. And in this solitude the most frightful things are taking place. I ask you to look into my soul for a little. I shall excuse nothing, hide nothing. [*Pause. Speaking evenly, but in haste.*] Some years ago there came a time in my life when I became sensible of a profound dissatisfaction. There was no God in my life and I did not know it. I wearied of my existence and, unwilling to face the true reason, I told myself that in a change of circumstances I should find happiness. In this thought I was seconded by one dear to me, by her and her needs. But I could not see how to change those circumstances. And then one day a chance presented itself—suddenly, with an appalling clarity and swiftness. First the base thought came to me—through the mouth and eyes of another. How I remember those moments!—since then I have spent whole nights reviewing them. After the base thought came a strong imagination of the deed—for this other presented it in dumb show before my eyes. I felt a delight to see him do it and, when he was gone, terror, ecstasy, and fury seized me, and an appetite for revenge upon him for the many taunts he had spoken, and for the very fact that he had suggested an evil, I was only too ready to accept. I remember how still the room was. [*With growing suppressed excitement.*] Suddenly my will consented—I felt a vertigo seize my brain and whirl it round; there was a sound like the sound of waters roaring over a precipice

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in my ears; and—the next thing I knew I was doing it. I recognized in a second that I had changed my whole life, but I didn't stop. My brain cleared almost as quickly as it had clouded: I realized I must act according to the new circumstances I had created. And with realization came a feeling of extraordinary security, lightness, and power. I had committed a crime. As I stood there I reckoned in my head the chances I had of repairing what I had done before Time brought my deed to light. I saw those chances were good, and I resolved to trust to them. [*More slowly.*] But evil leads to evil as surely as the cataract to the fall. [*With renewed haste.*] He whom I had cheated happened to come upon the train of my deed. Circumstances then made it necessary to thrust the crime on to another's shoulders. With the same sense of clarity, light, and power I thrust it on to shoulders most likely to break beneath it. Once more circumstances, that ride you if you do not ride them, favoured me. I had embezzled, and for that crime—eight years ago—[*Lois rises and kneels on the footstool before the crucifix*]—and for that crime—and for that crime—help me! Can't you see?

RUPERT [*staggered*]. What . . . you mean to say you . . . and——

BENTLEY [*clutching his own throat*]. Gods! though my tongue break in my mouth I *will* say it! I stole your father's property, Adderly, and for that crime I swore Vyson into gaol.

[CLARA *jumps up.*

CLARA. What has that got to do with what you are doing now?

BENTLEY [*struggling*]. Hear me——

CLARA. Rupert—look at him: he's ill. Anyone can see that. He's mad. Say you don't believe him.

RUPERT. If this is true he's even more of a villain than I thought him. Let him proceed!

CLARA. What d'you mean? [RUPERT *shoots out an arm at Lois.*] You're crazy, too. He is fouling your nest as well as his.

RUPERT. Let him. Go on, Bentley: you stole the money my father was to give me, and then——?

CLARA. He shall not go on. [*Shaking Lois by the shoulder.*] Lois, Lois, leave that hideous thing and your mortifications. Wake up! Realize that you, I, all of us, are being ruined.

LOIS [*looking up in her face, coldly*]. What is that to me? I died yesterday.

CLARA. Ah, you ninny: you make me frantic—you and your cursed religion. [*Going to the end of the table opposite OSWALD.*] Oswald, I forbid you. You're ill. It's overstrain. Your brain's broken down.

BENTLEY. Send for the doctor then. Let me tell him what I tell you, and let him testify whether I am mad.

RUPERT. I forgot myself just now. Yes, he's ill. [*He makes a sign to her.*] Let him babble. I'll stop my ears. The doctor will tell us. He should be here any minute now.

BENTLEY [*savagely*]. Sit down, Clara. [*She*

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sits down.] So you've sent for a doctor, have you? That's modern civilization all over. Send for a doctor to prevent a man saving his soul! But before the doctor has his say I'll have mine. You shall hear me. A doctor! Larceny—mere kleptomania, eh? What will your doctor say to embezzlement? [*Slamming his fist down on the table.*] I have the figures here. Embezzlement—a simple case: four thousand pounds in bearer bonds stolen and sold abroad! Lying, eh? What will your doctor say to perjury—damned, hideous perjury—an innocent man's body sworn into gaol and his soul into traffic with fiends who shall work upon it till it is twice as crooked as it was before! I, I, Oswald Bentley, this man before you [*beating his chest*], cheated my client and ruined my partner, and I stand here and require judgement of you and of the world!

[*Lois rises and turns. She stretches out her right arm.*

Lois. Do you come knocking at the gates of heaven as though you would enter by storm—you, the renegade, the robber? [*Change of tone.*] Hush. Hush. Those who enter heaven, enter heaven as the martyrs do, bound hand and foot, helpless, upon their knees. Turn your gaze from them [*indicating CLARA and RUPERT, without looking at either*] and fix it upon Him [*gesturing to the crucifix*]. Mock Him not, or how shall He ever speak to you as He spoke to the thief crucified with Him? [*She resumes her prayer.*

BENTLEY. Forgive me, poor silent figure, and

you who kneel before it! I have sinned. Even the guilty are proud. I must submit.

CLARA [*rising*]. Have you any more to say, or is this farrago ended? May a wife speak yet to save her husband from ruin?

BENTLEY. Clara, do not be so bitter: my way has thorns enough without your fury.

CLARA [*bitterly*]. Go on then.

[*She shrugs at* RUPERT.

BENTLEY [*very swiftly*]. There is not much more to tell—only my victory, God's mirth, and my ruin. Vyson went to gaol. I was free. I flung myself into business with a double ardour. Two things I wished to forget: the voice of Vyson pleading on his knees behind me that day in the office, and the eye of God that is ever upon us, that is on us now. And I succeeded. I fought as if I were fifty men, and I won. I won! Exists there a more cruel mockery than that? I was successful. I became possessed of leisure—what for? To think. Ah, when heaven gave us heads it gave them but to teach us how easily the brain is over-set: fever, the chance dropping of a hammer from a bricklayer's stage, will do it—and we have a thousand distempers worse than any fever in our heads, and an incalculable jealous God, with the most ponderous of hammers, able to break nations, ever standing over us. To think! to think: there lies for the very innocent devouring uncertainty—for the guilty, ruin, madness, death! I was victorious, and the eye of God watched me carry my head high—I enjoyed power, and the hand of

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God moved in obscure places to outwit me. God is so terrible, so subtle, so patient! [*Lois rises and noiselessly takes the chair between the writing-table and the revolving bookcase. She fixes her eyes on BENTLEY's face.*] Vyson was flung into gaol; and God used even that circumstance to hasten my undoing. Through the machinations of fellow-prisoners it came about that Vyson never left these shores. Another—not Vyson—went down when the *Gigantic* sank.

RUPERT [*nearly shouting*]. What? Not dead!

BENTLEY. Dead if you like, but his spirit lives—they say the spirits of the evil do survive to haunt us—and his spirit haunts us now. It is very close to us. It is in this house.

RUPERT. Clara, you're right. He's mad.

BENTLEY. No, not mad. Listen: suffice to say that Vyson found means to make an enjoyment of visiting that punishment on me which it is the prerogative of God's justice alone to inflict. But God is more merciful, God is wiser and subtler than he. Vyson had appointed himself the delighted instrument of my torture and destruction; he lives to see himself the instrument of my salvation.

[*CLARA rises; LOIS rises; RUPERT gestures: all seem about to speak. The pantry door opens: BRYANT, pale and pinched as a corpse enters. CLARA violently waves him away. But BRYANT takes no notice and they perceive that he is*

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strangely dressed—he has almost a smart look, there is a carnation in his button-hole, but his red wig is awry. From time to time he twitches. He advances to the table, and, leaning one hand upon it, raises the other for silence. LOIS gestures to BENTLEY, as if to say “It is he,” but BENTLEY, clutching the top of his chair, is looking at the table. BRYANT looks at CLARA, at RUPERT, at LOIS with dull eyes. Then he gives BENTLEY a long, meditative glance.

BRYANT. Bentley, I deny that you suffer more than I, though you are the better man.

[He moves to the middle of the conservatory windows and turns round. CLARA rushes to the end of the table.]

CLARA. I see it all. He is the instrument. It is Vyson: this servant!

RUPERT. By ——!

[He stares at BRYANT's face.]

BRYANT [*strangely*]. Hush. Hush. You are in the presence of the dead. Vyson is dead. Bryant is dying. Madam, the husband you know is about to perish before your eyes.

CLARA. Ah! What d'you mean? I'll stop the tongue that says so!

[She makes as if to rush at him. RUPERT intercepts her.]

RUPERT. No, Clara, no.

[RUPERT pulls her gently back downstage, holding her by the wrist.]

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BENTLEY [*without raising his head*]. Let him finish. He can do me no harm.

BRYANT [*to CLARA, calmly and sadly*]. Do not trouble yourself about me, madam. I am going I have stolen a ticket from Bentley

[RUPERT glances at BENTLEY. BENTLEY shrugs and bends his glance on the table again.]

BRYANT. Ah, madam, how strangely destiny moves! In other lives, under other circumstances, we two could have understood each other. You and I are very unfortunate . . . [*He looks at RUPERT.*] You, the ordinary man, are happy . . . [*He looks at LOIS. Pause.*] You, I don't understand you . . . [*He pulls the carnation out of his buttonhole and smells it absently.*] . . . We are all very unfortunate . . . and if what Bentley says is true we are more unfortunate still, for we are abused . . . most of all I . . . [*He passes his hand round inside his collar, clasps his hands together, looks at them all shyly, with a faint smile.*] I beg your pardon. . . . I have troubled you, made a scene. . . . I should have died when I was born; good-bye.

[*He casts his carnation, turns, opens the doors very wearily, and goes.*]

RUPERT. Was it? It must have been! But what on earth——?

CLARA. An instrument! The chosen of God!
[*She laughs hysterically.*]

RUPERT. I'll stop him. [*Shouting.*] Vyson! Vyson!

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CLARA [*clinging to him*]. You shall not. Let him go. With him goes our ruin. He is the only evidence—save those here. As for him [*jerking her head toward BENTLEY*], we can trust to the doctor.

BENTLEY [*lifting his head*]. Has he gone then? [*In reverie.*] Shall I never see him again?

CLARA. Gone and for good. Now, Oswald, you have had things your own way—we want you to do one thing for us.

BENTLEY [*suspicious*]. What's that?

CLARA [*tenderly*]. Sit down and keep quiet.

BENTLEY. Aha! Wait for the doctor, eh? I ask nothing better. By the time he has certified me sane the police will be here. I telephoned for them last night.

CLARA [*falling back*]. The police! But—what—for?

BENTLEY. I am going to tell them what I told you: I am going to give myself up.

CLARA. Give—yourself—up? [*Going toward him slowly and searching his face.*] Turn your face to the light. Let me look at you. Is this the Oswald Bentley I married? [*Suddenly, nearly hysterical, flinging out her arms, screaming.*] No. It can't be true. This isn't he! Oswald, you're not——! You'll break my heart! You're mad. You must be mad. No sane man could act so! [*She flings herself on him and shakes him.*] Come to your senses, before it is too late! The police! [*To RUPERT, over her shoulder.*] Did you hear

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that? He says the police are coming here. Here! To this house, his home, where we've been so happy! [*To OSWALD again.*] What's come over you?—think, man, think what you're doing! Look at me. Now. [*Dropping her arms.*] Let's be quiet. Say after me, slowly—"The police are not coming to this house." Say it. "The police—"

BENTLEY [*with chill emphasis, interrupting*]. Don't attempt to stop me, Clara. The police are coming. They are coming, as I instructed them, for fear of you, straight over that lawn, through the conservatory, and into this room.

CLARA [*beating on his breast with her fists*]. What are you made of that you can be so obstinate? They shall not come in here. Why should they come in here?

[OSWALD is about to thrust her away when he meets the eyes of LOIS, who has risen, regarding him. LOIS lays her fingers on her lips. Pause. BENTLEY carries his free arm to his head with a gesture of extreme pain. There is a shout, a crash without.

RUPERT. What's that? That was Vyson's voice!

[*He lays his hands on the conservatory doors.*

CLARA. Oswald, if they come in here I'll fling myself on them and they'll have to kill me.

[*The report of a fire-arm without.*

RUPERT. What! Who fired?

[*He wrenches open the conservatory doors. All turn. He steps through and abruptly*

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closes them behind him. Lois glances toward BENTLEY. Their eyes meet.

CLARA [*pulling at him*]. The police! Run. Quick. [*She is unable to make him move.*

BENTLEY. Clara, if you do not wish me to strike you, desist.

CLARA. Strike, then: *that* will not wound me!

BENTLEY. Clara, if you persist I'll cry out my guilt.

[*RUPERT steps through the conservatory doors, and closes them.*

RUPERT. Keep calm. Something terrible has happened. Bryant—Vyson, I mean—has shot himself. The doctor is with him.

BENTLEY [*with a great cry*]. Paul! Paul! poor Paul!

RUPERT. The doctor says telephone for an ambulance, though it's pretty hopeless. You, Lois. Sumpton nine five. [*Lois goes to the telephone.*] It'll take ten minutes at least. He'll be gone in five.

CLARA [*passionately*]. Let him die. Drop that telephone, Lois. [*She steps forward.*

RUPERT. Clara—— [*He intervenes.*

LOIS. Sumpton nine five.

CLARA. He has destroyed Oswald. Let him die, I tell you.

RUPERT. Quick, Lois. She doesn't know what she's saying.

[*He forces CLARA into a chair by the table.*

LOIS. Sumpton Hospital? Send an ambulance up to Mr. Bentley's—yes, Mr. Oswald Bentley's

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—Hilltop Rise—yes—at once. Doctor—what's his name, Rupert?

RUPERT. Hastings.

LOIS. Doctor Hastings says so. There has been an accident—gunshot wound. In the conservatory, yes, on your left as you come up the drive. At once. Life and death.

[She hangs up the receiver and stands looking at BENTLEY.]

CLARA *[standing up, weakly]*. You're all against me, but I'll fight you to the last.

RUPERT. I'm not, Clara—but you must keep your head. *[A call without.]* Coming! *[He goes through the doors, pulls them to behind, then, after a brief pause, looks in and says.]* The doctor says you can counter-order the ambulance. He needs me in there.

[He goes out again. LOIS puts her hand on the telephone.]

CLARA *[coldly]*. Let be. The ambulance can take the body to the mortuary.

LOIS *[shocked]*. Clara, how can you!

CLARA *[who has been pulling herself together, sternly]*. What is death to me? I am wrestling with life. Listen, you two. That man—Bryant, Vyson, call him what you will—is dying. Rupert I can count on. Lois, you will be silent about what you have heard in this room.

LOIS. I shall do as Oswald wishes.

CLARA. Do you defy his wife?

LOIS. It is Oswald's guilt, not yours. I do as he wishes.

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CLARA. What d'you say, Oswald?

BENTLEY. I say I am mocked to the last. Whether I confess or not, it must all come out in the evidence at the inquest. The devil has played against me, not God.

CLARA. Leave God out of this. It will not. You hire a servant. His name is Bryant. One morning, after behaving oddly for some time, he commits suicide. What of it?

BENTLEY. He will have told the doctor—and yet—no, perhaps not.

LOIS. Oswald, be careful. You are trifling with damnation.

CLARA [*whipping round*]. Be silent, you wretched girl. [*Change of tone.*] If he does not speak we are saved.

BENTLEY. The police are coming.

CLARA. Very well. We suspected mischief. The mischief has come about. It lies in there breathing its last.

BENTLEY. That is not good enough.

[CLARA runs over to the writing-table and wrenches out a drawer.

CLARA. As I thought. Who stole the revolver then? Isn't it mischief enough to have a madman about the house and your revolver stolen at the same time?

[BENTLEY comes over and stands looking vacantly at the drawer.

LOIS. Trapped!

CLARA. Silence! I am his wife. You are only a dependent. Go and pray if you feel that way

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inclined. May it do you and him good. For myself, I'll fight. I don't give in to shadows. [*She nestles to BENTLEY as he moves to the fireplace and stands looking gloomily down at the fender.*] Listen to me, Oswald: you want, for some obscure reason, to give yourself up. Think what you are doing—you have built up a big business—you are ruining that, and with it Rupert's credit. You have acquired a reputation for uprightness and sanity—you are disgracing that. If you dislike business you can retire from it: you have money, a comfortable home, a wife who loves you. [*Lois falls on her knees before the crucifix.*] I haven't much time in which to argue, and little ability: I have never had to plead before. You see three lives before you—Rupert's life, Lois' life, and my life—and all three you are going to disgrace or destroy in addition to your own. All three persons love and honour you: you are going to strike that love and honour dead. I'm too proud to plead the love I've given you in a room in which I've so often spent myself tending you. I will say only this: look in your heart—my love, our love is written there on the tablet of every day's memory throughout twelve struggling years. When I came to you I was twenty-three and you told me I was beautiful. Yes, I remember that, and how a year later, on the first anniversary of our marriage, standing with me in your arms you said, "Everything is older and uglier by a year—only you become more beautiful, more perfect, every day." Ah, when I think of that I could scream! And

look at me now—look at these lines about my eyes, look at my hair in which only a week ago I found grey threads, though I am only thirty-five. I have given you all that—but I do not repent. All, all I ever had in the world I have spent on you. I ask of you in return only one thing—do not persist in this idea. You have confessed to us. Be satisfied with that.

BENTLEY [*agonized*]. God, my God, where are you? If you live, hear and save me! [*Pause*.

CLARA [*softly*]. You see, He does not answer. His love deserts you—but, were you a thousand times more guilty than you are, not mine, not mine!

BENTLEY [*despairingly*]. Lois!

CLARA. Hush, she is at her prayer. Listen. [*Speaking very low.*] If you do as you say, you will ruin her as well.

BENTLEY. That is not true.

CLARA [*as before*]. She has no support but you and me, and we shall be ruined.

BENTLEY. That is not true, either.

CLARA [*as before*]. Shall I call Rupert and say to him, "There is Lois: take her. Yesterday, out of her devotion to Oswald, she threw you over"—for I'm sure you made her do it—"I do not know what is in her heart, but now Oswald doesn't after all want her, he gives you her back. She hasn't a penny, as a matter of fact, but she now says she's sure she loves you."

BENTLEY. Vyson, Vyson, you were right. You held my deliverance in your hand!

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[He bends his arm as if presenting a pistol to his temple. The conservatory doors open. RUPERT steps in. He passes his hand across his forehead. BENTLEY and CLARA turn. They bow their heads. Silence.]

RUPERT *[with difficulty, at length]*. Yes. He's gone. *[LOIS crosses herself and resumes her prayer.]* How he sighed! I never heard such sighs. *[His voice breaks. Pause.]* How hard death is!

CLARA *[coming to]*. Did he say anything?

[DOCTOR HASTINGS comes in with a towel over his hands. He looks fatigued, but is still precise: a man of the world, something of a dandy, a torpedo beard, blue eyes, fine features, pince-nez.]

DR. HASTINGS *[closing the door with care]*. Er—Mr. Adderly's told you, eh? *[LOIS rises and faces the room.]* Yes, he's gone, poor fellow. Most extraordinary case.

CLARA. Did he say anything?

DR. HASTINGS. Oh, yes. By Jove, he was set on it though. As I turned my car about I saw a figure emerge on the balcony of the conservatory. Something about it attracted my attention. He was fastening a rope. I could see a loop round his neck. I ran forward. Before I got quite up he shouted "Judas!" twice and hurled himself over. It was a small drop, and he'd miscalculated it in his hurry. His toes just touched the ground. He'd not broken his neck, but was strangling. I

cut him down. It was easy—thin garden rope. He fell in a heap, and while I was working at the rope round his neck he must have whipped the thing out and shot himself. Even there he was unlucky—owing to my elbows being in the way, I suppose. Anyway, the bullet went in under his heart, not through it. Well, well, he's at rest now! Perhaps it was best. I see a lot of life in my profession. Poor Humanity's hard tried. All the same . . . yet I don't know, we can't judge. He showed uncommon determination. And his face! The witness box for me again, I suppose, confound it. By Jove, there was one thing he did just before he died——

CLARA [*tip-toe*]. Yes?

DR. HASTINGS. He mentioned your name, Bentley.

BENTLEY [*hoarsely*]. Yes?

DR. HASTINGS. It was a struggle for him to speak at all. He said, "Tell Bentley there is no God." Crazy, I suppose. Religious mania, or rather t'other way about. . . . [BENTLEY *becomes impassive, looking at the ground. Looking at the towel.*] Glad I was carrying this [*lifting up the towel*] in my bag. Might I wash my hands, Mr. Bentley? They're very—h'm, unpleasant thing to happen.

CLARA. I'll come with you.

[*They go out by the door to the right.*]

LOIS. Oswald, don't let them go!

RUPERT. I presume you'll not insist now,

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Bentley. I shall have to break with you, of course. Our partnership will have to end. But I'll say nothing. That I have it in my power to ruin you goes without saying. But, for the sake of Lois——

LOIS [*over her shoulder*]. That will do, Rupert. Please leave us a moment. The ambulance men and the police will be coming. Keep the police round the body till we send for them.

[RUPERT *takes a long look at the pair, seems about to speak, and then goes out through the conservatory doors.*

LOIS [*speaking almost in his ear, softly*]. The Almighty, the ever-living God, is coming very close now. We have but a few moments in which to choose. Clara is busy explaining things away to the doctor, telling him you've had a breakdown. Rupert is outside waiting to keep the police back till you decide. [*Drawing away.*] I will say nothing. I hope all the prayers I have said, kneeling there while the storm raged, will work for you. But you must decide for yourself. When you have decided, I swear to help you by every means in my power, even if you decide against God. For it is He alone in the end can judge you—not I.

[*She watches him.*

BENTLEY [*moodily, speaking to himself*]. "Tell Bentley there is no God." Is that the truth or a lie? [*Moving into the middle of the room.*] "Tell Bentley there is no God." Grant me a sign! a sign! [*LOIS tiptoes after him. He stops and shudders. Then he looks absently at the crucifix.*]

GUILTY SOULS

Your candles are all but out. How pale You look. You have no strength left. Lift up Your luckless head. Speak to me. . . .

LOIS [*tentatively*]. Time runs away, Oswald.

BENTLEY [*slowly*]. This choice is not of my making. Let things take their course.

LOIS. You renounce God?

BENTLEY. No. God renounces me. Let come what may come. If I escape, well and good; if I don't, well and good. I didn't ask to be burdened with a soul. Let God do with it what He will—take it to Himself or cast it into the Pit.

[*The DOCTOR, followed by CLARA, enters.*]

DR. HASTINGS. Well, Bentley, all this is very unfortunate [*jerking his head over toward the conservatory*—if these ladies would be so good [*shooting an interrogative glance at LOIS*] as to—er—there are some aspects of this affair which I think we might—— [*CLARA makes a move to go.*]

BENTLEY. Hastings, I've known you three years—why play the hypocrite now? You manifestly hate shuffling. Clara has just told you I've had a very serious breakdown, eh?—that I've an *idée fixe* against myself, eh? Come, isn't it so?

DR. HASTINGS [*sweetly*]. Not a bit of it. I myself can see you're overwrought.

BENTLEY. Very well. I'm shaken. So are we all.

DR. HASTINGS. Mr. Adderly rang me up late last night when I was out and left a message for me to come on. That was before this—er—affair.

BENTLEY [*firmly, but quietly*]. Rupert did,

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did he? Well, he had no right to do any such thing. I'm still master here.

DR. HASTINGS. Of course, if you object to being examined——

BENTLEY. I'm sorry there should be any unfriendliness. Good morning, Doctor.

DR. HASTINGS. Later then, eh? Soberly, Bentley, speaking unofficially as a friend, I can see——

BENTLEY. I believe you. We'll meet later. Say in an hour. I don't feel equal to interrogation just at present. The ambulance men will be coming to take the body to the mortuary, and, of course, the police. You'll have to wait for them, I suppose. There's the drawing-room—is there a fire in the drawing-room, Clara?

CLARA. I don't know—I think not.

BENTLEY. Well, then—you'll find a stove in there. Take a cigar.

[He points to the small table in the corner to the right.]

DR. HASTINGS. Er—thank you—*[glancing at conservatory]*—well, no, perhaps not. Well, then, in an hour, after the police fuss is over. Exactly.

[He motions CLARA to accompany the doctor to the conservatory doors.]

CLARA *[low]*. Keep the police out as long as possible, will you, Doctor? They'll only upset him.

DR. HASTINGS. I'm bound to say he appears normal. A bit strained, that's all. Thank you.

GUILTY SOULS

[*He goes. CLARA closes the doors behind him and plants herself in front of them.*

CLARA. Here I stand between you and destruction, and I don't leave these doors till you're saved.

BENTLEY. You can leave them.

CLARA. What? . . . what?

[*BENTLEY comes toward her.*

BENTLEY. Do what you will. I stand aside.

CLARA. Ah, Oswald, I always knew you loved me! You've come to your senses at last.

[*She casts herself into his arms. LOIS turns to the crucifix.*

LOIS [*to the crucifix*]. You forsake me also?

[*Fending off the figure from her sight with her left hand, she leans forward to blow out the right-hand candle, but lingers a moment without blowing*

CLARA. We haven't much time. Let us go over what we must say when the police come, so that their evidence will help us at the inquest. [*LOIS listens, tense.*] We know nothing of Bryant but——

BENTLEY [*pushing her off*]. Lies! Lies! So one crime leads to another. Have I perjured myself once to perjure myself again?

[*LOIS turns about.*

CLARA. But you must. [*BENTLEY turns rapidly and walks to the fireplace. CLARA follows him.*] Don't be absurd. You must. You have done so much.

BENTLEY [*with smothered bitterness*]. I've committed so many crimes I may as well commit

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one more. [*Louder*]. Come, out with it! Is that it?

CLARA. But if you're not going to confess? It's a mere minor necessity.

BENTLEY [*doggedly*]. No.

CLARA. But——

BENTLEY. My manhood has failed me, God has failed me, but truth remains.

CLARA. Truth—what is truth?

BENTLEY. Pilate's question. [*Almost shouting.*] By heaven!—the choice is yet to make, and I must make it. None escapes God!

LOIS. Now is the time! Now is the hour! Beat upon the gates of heaven: surely they shall be opened to you.

CLARA. Truth, God, heaven! [*She laughs hysterically.*] What are these? How d'you know they exist? Will they give you shelter? Here is my bosom, and my heart in it. Here is my love!

BENTLEY [*doggedly*]. Truth? God? . . . I don't know. [*Brief pause.*] But one thing I do know: whether guilty or not, I'll tell no more lies. When I tell truth then I cease to be perplexed, I cease to be afraid.

CLARA. Ah, it's fear prompts you: fear of what? Will God hurl something at you? But if God does not exist? Of being found out? Who is to find you out?—unless Lois tells?

LOIS. I shall not tell. He must choose.

CLARA. You hear that?

BENTLEY [*struggling*]. It is not fear. I must tell the truth.

GUILTY SOULS

CLARA. But why?

BENTLEY. Because I can do no other. Lies! Lies! my soul revolts at them. Guilty or not in the past, I will not be guilty in the future.

CLARA. Guilty? Guilty? And what does that mean?

BENTLEY. I don't know, but I feel it.

LOIS [*quickly*]. Guilt is God's witness in the world.

CLARA [*turning on her*]. How dare you? [*Turning to BENTLEY.*] And so guilt is God's witness, is it? She says so, she—a girl of that age—knows! [*With sustained passion.*] Guilt is God's witness in the world—a fine non-existent witness of the non-existent God! God! I tire of that word. I curse the eastern madman who invented it. The sun had turned his wits! God! God!—the refuge of all that is weak and second-class and afraid of facing things as they are. God!—what do we know of Him, when we have seen Him?—we, a race of fugitive phenomena on a third-rate planet! God!—a word for servants, a refuge for the destitute! a comforter for urchins puling in the dark! And this word isn't even stable. They call this, that, and the other "God"—one day it's the Absolute, the next it's Evolution-in-being. And what's it matter? We get on very well without Him. The fire is lighted in the morning and the breakfast is ready. The man you say you wronged has gone to his account. Nobody requires you to give yourself up or turn evidence against yourself. Nothing is served by raking the

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episode up. What do you expect in this world? A second Christ? A new Evolution? The last judgement? They are unlikely. We are born, and after a little we die—we work, have regular habits, a little music, and, if we are lucky, some love returned for the love we give. What more can you expect? What more can you want?

BENTLEY [*weakly*]. I want to prove myself, to know what I am, what I live for, what I live by.

CLARA [*with sustained passion, very rapidly*]. An illusion. It's always the same with men—the house and humanity is not enough. They want to go outside. What for?—to turn dizzy at the stars, at the spectacle of the unsearchable. As if there were any more truth outside than in! Mankind has formed habits which are the best for getting the world up, running it, and putting it back to bed again. And man forms a theory to account for those habits—he says “this proceeds from the operation of the law of God,” or “of Evolution”: anything, in short, but what it really is—namely, mutual advantage—and the generations fall down and worship it. And we are expected to bow. I have bowed. It was simpler. There are only two women—the one who in her heart believes there is God, and the one who doesn't. There are no mere doubters. For myself, I do not.

BENTLEY [*slowly*]. Nor feel the need? How strange!

CLARA. Nor feel the need. All the gods I ever heard of were cruel. And would you take such a decision on such grounds?

BENTLEY. It is not what I think, but what I feel.

LOIS. She is right. It all depends on this—do you deny God or no?

CLARA. No—does God exist or no? And on that you have to judge whether you will ruin yourself and us!—on that—when head and heart are divided!

LOIS. Choose: if you feel there is God, then reason rules this life; if not, then it is a dream and we need not care how we live it.

CLARA. You cannot prove God.

LOIS. You cannot prove this life a dream.

BENTLEY. I need God—how can I judge fairly? I am in this life—how can I know it for a dream? Only those who are beyond that need and this life can know. [*Pause. Sudden exaltation. Almost with a roar.*] I have it! I see! Light! Light! Now, as ever, he is judge! [*He rushes to the conservatory doors and flings them open.*] Stand back, Rupert. Stand back, doctor. Let me look on him I slew, let me look on my judge. [*He stands in the doorway, looking down, with his back half turned to the room. Silence.*] Uncover his face. [*BENTLEY bends forward. Then he slowly straightens. His bent arms rise to the level of his shoulders, the fingers are fully extended. He is seen to be vibrating from head to foot.*] So. [*BENTLEY comes into the room again with his eyes screwed up, tight shut, his lips widely parted. He draws his breath like one who emerges from icy water.*] I pity him. [*Calmer.*] Anti-Christ also bears our cross.

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CLARA. Pity? Pity?

BENTLEY. It is my sins have made him so ugly . . . that too will happen to me . . . death . . . and I must choose . . . ah, what have we done that you should torture us? . . . why should he be compelled to such a stroke? . . . Why, why? . . . to end it all? . . . what is that?—to escape? . . . Why, for me, also, to escape! . . . to hide my head somewhere and never be heard of again!

CLARA [*gently, with her hands upon her bosom*]. Here.

LOIS. Where better but in God?

CLARA [*tensely, pointing*]. He is dead. You say he is your judge. Listen to his last finding, delivered with stiffening lips—"There is no God."

[*Pause. BENTLEY lowers his head.*

BENTLEY [*suddenly bursting out*]. Dead! He should have lived . . . God's work has begun in him! He cried "There is no God." Alas, he had begun to fear there might be. O Vyson, the God whom you denied is wise: out of your very death springs my life. You, not I, are coward. "There is no God." You dared not face Him.

LOIS [*fiery*]. Dare you? Time runs on. God is not patient for ever.

BENTLEY [*downcast*]. It is true. I have done nothing. All is yet to do. [CLARA *runs forward.*] Stand back. Touch me not. I am on fire. I have fallen into the hands of the living God!

[RUPERT *comes in and closes the doors behind him.*

GUILTY SOULS

RUPERT. The police have arrived. The doctor is talking to them.

[*He withdraws, after a glance at Lois.*]

CLARA [*weak, at her wits' end*]. Oswald one moment Oswald I

BENTLEY [*gently*]. No, Clara.

[*He shakes his head.*]

CLARA. Oswald . . . I'll say *I* stole the bonds . . . won't that do? . . . and you shielded me. [*His eyes are closed. He takes no notice. His lips move.*] Oswald . . . Oswald . . . take all I have left: my pride [*she falls on her knees to him, close by the table.*] . . . I beseech you . . . don't do it.

[BENTLEY turns his back on her. She collapses against the table.]

BENTLEY [*to Lois*]. You see! You see! Even if I have chosen, how can I perform? [*Gesturing back at his wife.*] Does God desire this?

LOIS. "Many must be offended because of Me this night."

BENTLEY. My wife, my love. You know what love is.

LOIS [*quietly*]. You say that to me?

BENTLEY. The love she spent on me.

LOIS. Before she loved you, God loved you.

BENTLEY. Her sufferings. [*Lois stands aside and slowly gestures toward the crucifix.*] Vyson is dead: man's justice does not demand it, can God's?

LOIS. God's justice did not demand that His own Son should die.

BENTLEY. I am not God's son.

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LOIS. Are you so sure?

BENTLEY. I cannot at such a cost: it means cruelty, prison, disgrace, exile from the love of man.

LOIS. It means love, freedom, grace, home in the heart of God.

BENTLEY. No . . . no. [*He shakes his head, sadly.*] Will you blame me?

LOIS. No man or woman will blame you.

BENTLEY. But to despise her love, to ruin her and hers, to do what I must do, and to live knowing I have done it! What could God ever give in exchange?

LOIS [*fiery*]. Who taught you to expect aught of God? And who judged you worthy to deserve it? Why do you desire to cast out God when God opens his arms to you? Hell gapes beneath your feet, heaven opens over your head. All the fiends, and all the angels watch you and He, who died for you, turns his eyes upon you.

BENTLEY. Ah, I hate God! What am I that He should require this service of me?

LOIS. He does not require it. It is your imperfection that feels the need of it. And why should you not serve Him, whom all creation is bound to serve?

BENTLEY. . . . I cannot. [*He chokes.*]

LOIS. Very well. Call in the police. I acquit you. Tell your lies. [*BENTLEY gestures. Pause.*]

BENTLEY. How do I know that I am sufficiently repentant?—that this is not some temptation to pride?

GUILTY SOULS

LOIS [*loudly*]. Presume not to judge of your temptations. [*Softly.*] Does not all seem bitter to you but God?

BENTLEY [*loudly*]. Ah, God, Thou knowest that I love Thee!

LOIS [*softly*]. But not sufficiently to serve Thee.

BENTLEY [*loudly*]. I would not offend Thee!

LOIS [*softly*]. But declare I am too weak to do Thy will.

BENTLEY [*softly*]. Anything—save this!

LOIS [*softly*]. Thy crown, but not Thy cross!

BENTLEY [*loudly*]. Have pity on me! Thou hast forgiven sinners.

LOIS [*softly*]. With Thy stripes are we healed.

BENTLEY [*loudly*]. The stripes of the righteous, not the guilty! [*Softly.*] Can God love me—a thief?

LOIS [*very softly*]. “To-night thou shalt be with Me in Paradise!”

BENTLEY. Ah, if it could be true that He loved me!

LOIS. Look in your own soul. God loves you much to have stricken you so hard. You are unhappy enough to have found the Saviour.

BENTLEY [*to himself*]. Is it possible? . . . [*He moves toward the conservatory doors.*

CLARA, *shivering, draws herself up on to the chair and watches him. He raises his hand to the latch. She falls across the table.*] I perceive now how long I have loved Him. . . . can He love me too? . . . but if not . . . [*he stares through*

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the pines and, shuddering, turns away.] Yes, that, out there, were best . . . [*in reverie with his own soul.*] "There is no God" . . . either that or this . . . if no God, and consequently no love from God, a bullet were best . . . if God and God's love, all this pain were nothing. [*He stops short.*] Yes. I have solved it at last. [*He looks up.*] Lord, I believe: help Thou my unbelief. [*He sees his wife.*] And there she lies! [*A prolonged shudder.*] Lord, have pity on me. [*He lifts his clasped hands.*] What shall I do? I do not love Thee enough if I love anything more than I love Thee! I am weak: Thou art strong. I love Thee, and Thou hast stricken me.

LOIS [*fiery*]. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. Fall upon your knees. Beat upon His threshold with your hands! The world passes away! All is vanity, except to love God and to serve Him only.

BENTLEY [*falling on his knees*]. I am weak, Thou art strong: save me! I sought Thy sweetness, and Thou hast shown me Thy bitterness. Bid what Thou wilt and give me will to do what Thou biddest—but not this! not this!

LOIS. Saviour! Saviour!

BENTLEY. I can't! I can't! [*Silence. He rocks.*] Be merciful! [*Silence. He rocks.*] Lord! Lord! [*Silence. He stretches his arms out wide.*] Thou seest I am nothing: I am not worthy. [*Crisis.*] What are we?—nothing! [*He bows down till his head nearly touches the floor.*] Noth-

GUILTY SOULS

ing! [*He bows down again.*] And behind that—nothing!

[*His face touches the floor. He spreads out his arms.*

LOIS [*softly, holding her hands out over him as over a victim*]. “Not my will, but Thy will.”

BENTLEY. Choose Thou for me.

[*LOIS makes the sign of the cross over him.*
Complete silence.

LOIS [*softly, at last*]. He has chosen. [*She kneels down and raises him softly up. She remains on her knees. She wipes the sweat from his forehead. She takes his hand and kisses it reverently. His eyes remain shut.*] There, Oswald, look at me. [*He opens his eyes very slowly. He stands up. She still holds his hand. He breathes deeply.*] Is it so difficult to serve God? Is He not merciful? [*Pause.*] Shall I call them in?

[*BENTLEY nods. She rises and goes to the doors. Meanwhile BENTLEY stands like a man in a dream. CLARA suddenly rises. LOIS opens the doors. CLARA goes over to BENTLEY. LOIS glances back.*

LOIS [*to those in the conservatory*]. In one moment.

[*RUPERT steps in, giving LOIS an interrogatory glance.*

CLARA [*with an insane look*]. There is one more card. [*LOIS comes up on BENTLEY's right. Cunningly.*] Oswald, I know the secret of men's

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hearts. Here is Lois—give me your hand, girl. There, Oswald, take her—she's yours. I give you all—to the last drop. [*With queer triumph.*] Kiss her. There, now. There.

LOIS [*aghast, trembling*]. Clara! [*Wounded.*] Clara! [*She covers her face.*]

RUPERT [*rushing forward and striking their hands apart*]. I see it all. Lies, Clara! Lies! How dare you touch her?

[*LOIS uncovers her face. CLARA looks at them and trembles.*]

CLARA [*stilly*]. What . . . has that, too, failed? Ah, let me die here: I am out of place among all these stones! [*She staggers to the table. Suddenly crying out.*] Bryant, Bryant, where's your pistol? You have four chambers left for me!

[*She runs toward the doors. The two plain-clothes men enter. She falls back, veers aside to the revolving bookcase and stands gasping. The plain-clothes men take up positions on each side of the doors. BENTLEY turns.*]

BENTLEY. Officers, I desire to give myself up to arrest. I have committed the crimes of embezzlement and perjury. That suicide in there I will explain. My deposition lies on the table. Here, take it. [*He hands the deposition.*]

RUPERT [*who has followed him*]. Bentley!

BENTLEY. Not now, Rupert.

RUPERT. Bentley, I—haven't I told you I won't—don't be absurd—I promise—

GUILTY SOULS

BENTLEY. Rupert, you can promise me one thing. I never loved this girl [*indicating Lois*] nor she me: save with the ghostly passion of those who seek and suffer together. Go to her. See how spent she is! If you wish to atone for having believed what you were provoked to believe against us, go to her humbly and implore forgiveness and do not cease importuning her till you have it. As for me, my steps lead otherwise. Officers— [*He advances and turns round between them at the doors.* RUPERT looks at LOIS and then goes over to the table and stands, leaning with his back against it, watching her.] One moment, gentlemen. I will wait, if you please, till the ambulance and doctor have gone: I see they are going. With their burden and with mine goes a curse from this house. [*To LOIS, RUPERT, and CLARA.*] I would like to give you my blessing [*with a glance of compassion toward CLARA*], all of you. You have been very patient. But what is the blessing of a guilty soul? Be happy, as I learn to be happy now in my unhappiness. For of this I am sure, beyond all disproof—unless we suffer we have not seen God. [*He spreads his hands and stands very still. Pause. Revulsion.*] What am I saying? It is I, I am guilty. Forgive me, all of you, what I have done, and not that sin only, but the special sins I have sinned against each of you in these last hours. [*He glances at RUPERT, at CLARA, at LOIS, who has turned away and covered her face.*] You are spent, but forgiveness refreshes and strengthens: it was that which made Christ able to

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bear His cross. . . . Is there none here strong enough to make the effort? Am I alone strong here, who deemed myself the weakest? . . . How strange! Lois, you—alas, how all differs from expectation! [*He looks at each in turn again. To himself, looking at Lois.*] Not even you, whom I have wounded most? [*He groans.*] This also is for me. [*He covers his face with his hands, then lowers them, draws a long breath, looks up, folds his hands.*] My cup is full. [*He turns about, clasping his hands above his head.*] Into Thy hands. Into Thy hands.

[*He goes out escorted by the plain-clothes men. Pause.*]

RUPERT. I am ashamed—we should—yet he's guilty.

LOIS [*rushing to the doors and calling*]. I do forgive you. I do forgive you.

RUPERT. He's too far off. He can't hear.

LOIS. He *must* hear, he *must*. He will raise his head. [*Calling.*] I do forgive you. . . . No, he has not heard. [*Raising her arms.*] Father, God in heaven, tell him that I forgive him.

CLARA [*cold and fierce*]. God? We have had too much of God. Hypocrite: he was afraid.

LOIS [*with a terrible intensity*]. If you say that I'll strike you.

RUPERT. Hush. Hush. We have had trouble enough—

CLARA. And shall have! Oh, he is damned!

LOIS. No! . . . no! . . . no! [*Lifting her arms.*] *Thou* dost witness he is saved!

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[She turns to the crucifix and kneels down before it, stretches out her arms toward it, as if in entreaty and joy. RUPERT moves over and kneels by her, placing his right arm about her neck and stretching out his left. CLARA steps to the window to the right. Her closed fists are pressed upon her mouth as if to stifle a cry, while with rigid glance she gazes after the departed group, as if she would fathom the heart of him who has gone. Through the open doors the bright, chill breeze blows, bringing with it the confused brilliant ringing of many hamlet bells.]

SLOW CURTAIN

PRODUCTION NOTES

All rights, including those of adaptation, translation, and cinematographic, in this play are strictly reserved by the author. These rights will be vigorously maintained.

ROBERT NICHOLS.

1. *General Mode.* The play is not to be set "realistically." I am not trying to reproduce life, but a synthetic selection from life, showing the operation of certain laws in "the mirror held up to nature." This drama being a drama in which abstract idea has a large place and psychological intimacy a still larger, the surroundings should be as abstract as possible in order to aid the effect of timelessness and help concentrate the attention of the audience on the actors. Indeed, for me the actor except in plays of special genre—such plays as the artificial comedy of Wilde, the puppet-and-fate drama of Maeterlinck, or *opéra bouffe* comedy—is the centre of the theatre. I write, not for the scene-painter, costumier, property-man, or electrician, but for the actor, and I go to the theatre to see actors act.

2. *Pace.* The play is to be played at a generally rapid pace, with special attention to appropriate slowings and quickenings.

3. *Climax.* Each act is to be produced in relation to the other acts, but each act is to work toward its own definite climax. The climax in Act I, Scene 1, is at the curtain; in Act I, Scene 2, where Vyson kneels at Bentley's feet; in Act II, at the curtain; in Act III, where Bentley turns

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and sees Lois at the conservatory doors; in Act IV, where Bentley bows down.

4. *Gesture*. The play should be rather "over-acted" than "under-acted." Any kind of "stunting" is permitted provided it does not split the ensemble and is expressive of the point to be driven home.

5. *Costume*. A blue serge suit and ugly boots for Bentley. A spruce green suit, rather too pronouncedly cut, a low, stiff "art" collar, bottle-green tie passed through a scarab ring, long pointed brown shoes for Vyson in Act I. Ill-fitting morning jacket and nondescript dark trousers, stand-up collar, and shoestring tie for Vyson in the remainder of the play, except at his last entry, when his dress shabbily recalls Act I. Sir Hector Adderly, pepper-and-salt spruce frock coat with vulgar stock. Joe, much-worn dark suit, carefully preserved. Doctor Hastings, short morning coat, black satin stock, pepper-and-salt trousers—he is the best-dressed man in the play. Clara, neat tailor-modes, a little harsh and daring in colour and pattern. In Acts II, III, and IV, she is much better dressed than in Act I. She is particularly neat in shoes and stockings. But it must be understood that she has nothing of the fashionable lady about her—she looks more like a smart example of a business-man's lady secretary, her aim being rather to please herself than to please any man she may meet. In short, her ideal is one of elegant efficiency rather than allurements or charm. Lois wears a long raincoat in

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Act I, and this rather disguises her extreme youth. In Acts II, III, and IV she is dressed in a black skirt, black silk stockings, patent leather shoes, a white silk blouse simply but beautifully cut, and wears a tiny crucifix tucked into her waist on a black ribbon round her neck. Hair, preferably, "bobbed." It is very important that she be dark, slight, serious, and good-looking, and possess a thrilling voice. She should be beautiful rather than pretty.

6. *Intervals.* Two minutes interval between Act I, Scene 1, and Act I, Scene 2. Five minutes between Acts I and II. Five minutes between Acts II and III. Three minutes between Acts III and IV. No music. No calls except, if necessary, after Act I and the final curtain.

7. *Stage Effects.* Lighting up of the office with sunlight when Bentley, after transferring the papers, goes to call "Paul! Paul!" in Act I, Scene 1. Sunlight gradually dying away throughout Act I, Scene 2. The room uniformly dull and gloomy throughout Act II. The sunset behind the conservatory lurid but not "stagey" and without clouds in Act III, during which the room is dim. Bright sunshine and panes glistening frostily throughout Act IV. The bells at the end faint and far, but crystal clear.





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